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Title:
Teaching Assistants' experiences of supporting pupils in a mainstream primary school context

an interpretative phenomenological analysis

Teaching Assistants' experiences of supporting pupils in a mainstream primary school context: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

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A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law.

School for Policy Studies

April 2017

Abstract

Teaching Assistants (TAs) can play an important role in the educational support for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The broad aim of this study was to understand TAs' experiences of supporting pupils in a mainstream primary setting. The second aim was to also understand their experiences of working with other professionals in order to support pupils. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews with four TAs working in mainstream primary schools who had recently attended the EarlyBird Plus training programme for pupils with autism. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed as a methodological framework and a method of analysis.

Three overarching themes were identified as important to participants' experiences of supporting pupils, these included: Being a TA and role Perceptions; Applying Learning to Practice; and TA Experiences and Perceptions of Inclusion. The findings suggested that TAs perceived the key aim of their role as helping the pupil to cope with the mainstream environment, and they acted either as a bridge or a gap filler. This raised questions as to why the gap existed in the first place, and implications for the TA role are discussed with reference to the agenda for inclusive education. Findings also suggested that training was generally useful for TA practice, although the benefits of training were broad and applicable to supporting all pupils, not only those identified as having SEN or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Personal values also influenced practice and how TAs applied learning from training to practice. This has not been identified in previous research and models of TA practice (Webster et al., 2011), and so this offers a unique contribution to the existing research base. Considerable variation existed between participant accounts regarding their working relationship with the class teacher and the level of responsibility they took for the pupil, which was influenced by the TAs' own goals, values, and personal status. Findings highlighted that some TAs felt excluded and marginalised within the wider system in which they worked. Findings also highlighted that although TAs may be influenced by wider systemic factors, as suggested in previous models, they are also active agents in their own practice. Implications for Educational Psychology practice are discussed.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

Firstly, this study would not have been possible without the Teaching Assistants who generously gave their time to share their experiences with me; it has been a privilege to be offered an insight into their daily lives, and I am very grateful.

Thank you to my research supervisor Beth Tarleton for the all the help, support, and words of encouragement. I would also like to thank the tutor team at the Norah Fry research unit for their ongoing support and interesting insights over the past three years.

Thank you to my DEdPsy course mates and friends who have offered support, reassurance and useful words of advice, as well as fun and laughter. I would also like to thank my placement colleagues for their unwavering belief and help on my journey to train as an EP, especially to Helen, Chelsea and Dennis from who I have learnt so much.

To my friends and family, thank you for your encouragement, interest, and distractions though out my academic journey, and a special thanks to Gill and Caroline for your helpful comments.

In particular I would like to thank my wonderful husband Ollie for his love and support, for being a patient and interested sounding board, and for being by my side every step of the way.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by special reference in the text, the work is the candidates own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with assistance of, others is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Signed: 

Date: 7th September 2016

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Glossary of Abbreviations

ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
BPS	British Psychological Society
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DEdPsy	Doctor of Educational Psychology
DfE	Department for Education
DISS	Deployment and Impact of Support Staff
EBP	EarlyBird Plus
EP	Educational Psychologist
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
NAS	National Autistic Society
NC	National Curriculum
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PMHW	Primary Mental Health Worker
PAL	Positive Approaches to Learning
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
TA	Teaching Assistant
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
WHO	World Health Organisation
WPR	Wider Pedagogical Role
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Chapter One: Introduction

The aim of the current study was to explore TAs' experiences of supporting pupils within a mainstream primary school context. TA's were recruited from a cohort who had recently completed the EarlyBird Plus (EBP) Training programme for children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and all TAs supported pupils with a diagnosis of ASD. This homogeneity of experience was an important assumption of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology employed. In this chapter I begin by defining my understanding of the key terms used in the study including: Teaching Assistant; Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Inclusion; and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). I then go on to consider the origins of the study and my own personal and professional interests in the topic area, followed by the context, rationale and main aims of the current study. I conclude the chapter with an outline of the thesis and a summary of each chapter.

1.1 Definition of Terms

Teaching Assistant (TA)

Adult support staff in education can be known by various titles including Teaching Assistants (TAs), Higher Level TAs (HLTAs), Behaviour Support Assistants, Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and Learning Coaches (Brown & Devecchi, 2013). As there is no clear and consistent role definition for adult support staff working in schools (Adamson, 1999; Blatchford, Webster, & Russell, 2012; Cajkler et al., 2007) I have referred to all adult support staff as Teaching Assistants (TAs) throughout this thesis, including in the literature review where the study's author may have referred to the role by a different name. The term TA seems to be preferred by most recent research (for example, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, et al., 2009; Blatchford, Russell, & Webster, 2012). It was also the term used by all participants in the current study to describe their job title, and is widely used within the local authority in which this study took place.

Inclusion and Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs and Disability (DfE, 2014p. 15), defines Special Educational Needs (SEN) as "*a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her*." although widely used by schools, the term is problematic and relates to debates about within-child conceptualisations of disability compared to the social construction of disability. The concept of inclusion is also inherently difficult to define as different conceptualisations exist, which are grounded in different theoretical perspectives of the nature of disability and Special Educational Needs (SEN). Although I briefly refer to this debate in the literature review, an in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of the current study.

My own belief is that SEN arise as a result of an interaction between impairment of an individual and barriers presented in their environment (Shakespeare, 2006). Inclusion of all children, including those identified as having SEN, should therefore refer to both support for the individual child as well as changing the system to reduce barriers to participation (Norwich, 2002). I also believe that inclusion should be considered across a range of concepts

including the child's *presence*, *participation, acceptance*, and *achievement* (e.g. academic achievement and social emotional skills; Humphrey, 2008). In the current study I have been conscious of the language I used to talk about constructions of SEN and inclusion; I refer to children as *identified as having* an SEN, so as not to accept a within-child conceptualisation of SEN and disability. In the study's research question I ask "How do TAs experience *supporting* pupils in a mainstream primary school" so as not to make assumptions about TA experiences and inclusion. The term *support* rather than inclusion is intentionally broad and allows space to understand how TAs view and define the support they offer as part of their role.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder can be defined as a "*lifelong developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people"* (NAS; 2017). ASD refers to a medical diagnosis which encompasses a number of conditions including: autistic disorder; Asperger's Syndrome; pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified; Rett's disorder; and childhood disintegrative disorder, and is included under the umbrella of Pervasive Developmental Disorders, as outlined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual -5th Edition (APA, 2013) and the ICD-10 (WHO, 1992). I also acknowledge that medical diagnoses can be viewed as socially constructed; however, such a debate is beyond the scope of this thesis.

1.2 Origins of the Study: Personal and Professional Interest

My reasons for choosing to explore TAs' experiences of supporting pupils in a mainstream setting are linked to my own fundamental values on inclusive education, my own previous experience of supporting pupils identified as having SEN and ASD, and also my experiences as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) in supporting adults who support children with ASD. It was important to me that I reflected on my own position throughout the research process; in line with my philosophical positioning of *Interpretivism* (which is discussed further in chapter three), I believe that my unique position as a researcher influenced my decisions throughout the research process and my interpretations of the data. 'Researcher position' refers to the researcher's unique stance contributed to by a combination of variables including (but not limited to) ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation , personal experiences,

beliefs, values, theoretical, political and ideological stances and emotional responses to the participant (Berger, 2015; Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Hamzeh & Oliver, 2010; Padgett, 2008), and I have reflected on these throughout this thesis.

In my previous role as a Primary Mental Health Worker (PMHW), I liaised with schools to gain information to assess children diagnosed with ASD, and help school staff consider how they might support the child's needs within a mainstream environment; however, it was not until my first term on the Bristol *Doctor of Educational Psychology* course that I began to consider how the school environment and social context could actually contribute to the child's difficulties. This was a totally different understanding of child development to the cognitive psychology models with which I had been most familiar from my undergraduate degree in Psychology. It also differed to my constructions of disability and difficulties in my previous roles as a PMHW and Health Care Support Worker, in which I ultimately viewed disability as medicalised and a deficit within the individual; with this new knowledge and through reflection of my own personal and professional values, I now fundamentally believe that all children and all people have the right to be included within social systems and that those systems should change to be appropriate for all people and not only pertain to the majority.

In my first year of training as a TEP I also remember being introduced to the research of Blatchford and colleagues (2009), and their finding that TA support may lead to poorer academic outcomes for pupils. I felt surprised by the findings that TA support could contribute to SEN considering TAs are employed to support children's outcomes. In my previous role as a PMHW I had often unquestionably advocated for more TA support for children identified as having SEN. It did not surprise me that the finding by Blatchford et al. (2009) had been linked to a lack of training for TAs; in a previous role as residential support worker for children with a diagnosis of ASD I had received no specific training, and I was left feeling ineffective at my job. I remember how challenging I found the role, particularly in terms of communication. TAs whom I've worked with in my role as TEP also talked about high stress levels and their dread of going into work every day. I realise now through training as a TEP and a PMHW, that my approach to communication in my previous role as a support worker had influenced these difficulties with the child (such as asking questions rather than giving direct instructions). I believe just a small amount of training would have changed my experience to be more

positive. Many TAs have told me how useful the EBP had been for them, and their change in practice that has occurred as a result of training. This therefore led to my interest in TAs' experiences of supporting pupils identified with SEN and ASD in a mainstream setting.

Throughout my training as a TEP I have become increasingly committed to supporting the inclusion of all children. At the same time I understand that this is not usually easy. From my own experience I believe that supporting children diagnosed with ASD, and with SEN in general can be both rewarding and challenging. I am therefore passionate about supporting adults in the school system to support pupils, and I would like to contribute to the development of opportunities for training and continuing professional development. This is linked to my own values regarding equality, inclusion, and the importance of lifelong education and personal development.

1.3 Context and Rationale of the Study

In order to provide a context for the current study, in this next section I provide information on the TA role. I will also outline details of the EarlyBird Plus (EBP) training programme as this was attended by all participants in the current study, which is discussed further in relation to the study's methodological considerations in chapter three.

1.3.1 The TA Role

Research has demonstrated considerable variation in the roles and responsibilities carried out by TAs (Adamson, 1999; Blatchford, Webster, et al., 2012; Cajkler et al., 2007). The previous Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (DfES, 2001) located the TA role as central to supporting pupils; pupils identified as in need of additional resources were issued Statements of Special Educational Need, and these Statements often stipulated that pupils should receive a minimum number of hours of TA support. The most recent Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) does not stipulate what support should be provided and by whom, which may be linked to recent suggestions that this may not be an effective allocation of resources (Webster, 2014), and recent moves towards decentralisation of decision making by local authorities with the aim to empower school leaders to make decisions about educational provision at a local level (Wilson & Game, 2011). Government guidance in 2000 entitled '*Working with teaching*

assistants: a good practice guide' (DfES, 2000) states that the TA role involves '*supporting pupils, teachers, the school and the curriculum'* (p.8). This highlights that expectations for the TA role are broad and varied and that TAs were introduced as an intention to generally support school life. Findings from recent research suggest that TAs continue to carry out the roles stipulated by this government guidance in 2000, and that TAs can offer support at many levels of the school system (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, et al., 2009). TAs most often spend time directly supporting pupils' academic learning and facilitating social interactions, either by taking pupils for group work or by working with pupils on an individual basis (Blatchford, 2006; Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, et al., 2009; Peter Farrell, Alborz, Howes, & Pearson, 2010). The TA role has generally been moving towards supporting learning rather than more general class room assistance (Groom, 2006), and this suggests that many TAs may take on more responsibility than simply offering *support* in these areas, as the government guidance in 2000 suggested.

1.3.2 The EarlyBird Plus (EBP) Training Program

The EBP is a training program offered to parents and/or carers of all children who have been diagnosed with ASD between the ages of four and eight years old within the local authority in which I work as a TEP. Parents of children who are diagnosed before the age of five years old are offered the NAS' programme aimed at supporting younger children; the *EarlyBird*. The EBP is attended by the child's parents and once a place is accepted by parents they are then offered to invite a school professional. Participants in the current study were recruited from a group of TAs who attended a programme within a local authority in the UK. The EBP aims to increase understanding of ASD, increase the confidence of people supporting the child, and develop skills to analyse and manage behaviour. The EB and the EBP are based on the practice and strategies of the NAS SPELL approach (Structure, Positive, Empathy, Low Arousal, Links) (Smeardon, 1998), the TEACCH approach (Mesibov et al., 2004), and the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS; Frost & Bondy, 2002) , which are outlined in figure 1.1.

Foundations of the EarlyBird Plus	
TEACCH	TEACCH is a teaching framework which aims to change the classroom environment to adapt to the needs of the child. This adaptation can include the use of visual supports and differentiation of work. Within TEACCH

	people diagnosed with ASD are considered unique but equal to others and TEACCH does not aim to provide a cure for autism (Mesibov et al., 2004)
NAS SPELL	The 'SPELL' approach (Smeardon, 1998) is an eclectic educational approach developed by the NAS. SPELL refers to *Structure* (to make the environment predictable), *Positive* (approaches and expectations), *Empathy* (whereby the world is seen from the child's viewpoint), *Low arousal* (in a clear, calm and clutter-free environment, which encourages the pupil to learn), *and Links* (refers to collaborative working with parents, other professionals and the community).
PECS	The Picture Exchange Communication System aims to teach young children with social communication difficulties a means of communicating within a social context. Children using PECS are taught to give a picture of a desired item in exchange for the item.

Figure 1.1: Foundations of the EarlyBird Plus

The EBP has been demonstrated to increase understanding of both the child's diagnosis and of strategies to support them, both at home and at school (Peters & Scott-Roberts, 2014). It is usually the TA who attends the training as the school professional. Training has been demonstrated to contribute to improved TA practice, although what is meant by training differs widely in the research literature (see chapter two). TAs in the current study all received the same training and it was hoped this would increase homogeneity in the sample in order to better understand their shared experiences. This was an important assumption of the methodology employed, which I discuss further in chapter three.

1.4 Aims of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyse TAs' experiences of supporting a pupil in a mainstream setting in order to understand more about the TA role and factors contributing to practice. All TAs had attended the EBP program in order to increase homogeneity in the sample with the aim to gain an in depth understanding of their shared experience. The current study also aimed to explore TAs' experiences of working with other professionals in the school system to support pupils. This study employed an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology in order to gain a deep understanding of individual TA experiences, and to use this information to understand divergences and convergences across participant experiences. It

was hoped that this would add to the current literature base and aid understanding of how TAs and pupils can be supported within the school system. The study does not aim to examine specific pupil outcomes, although an implicit assumption, drawn from research findings and my own professional practice, is that the actions of the TA impact on a variety of outcomes for pupils (Blatchford, Webster, et al., 2012).

1.5 Dissertation Overview

Chapter one has outlined my own personal and professional interests in the topic and how this has influenced my choice to study TA practice. It also outlined the context of the study and highlighted some concerns about TA support arising from research (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, et al., 2009).

Chapter two provides a critical overview of the current literature relating to the socio-political context of the TA role, the TA role and impact, and factors contributing to TA practice. Detailed consideration is given to key studies, particularly the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) study (Blatchford et al., 2006; 2009) and the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model for effective TA practice, which was developed from the findings of the DISS.

Chapter three considers the theoretical underpinnings of the current study including the nature of knowledge (epistemology), the nature of reality which this knowledge attempts to understand (ontology) and the role of values and ethics (axiology). This section also includes a background to IPA including the theoretical underpinnings and potential limitations. This chapter continues by providing an overview of the study design and methods employed to collect and analyse data, and I consider how my own positioning as a researcher influenced the study at this stage.

Chapter four presents the findings of the current study. I begin by providing an introduction to each of the four participants in the current study in order to provide a context for their interpretations of their experiences. I also reflect on my own experiences in order to provide the reader with a context of my interpretation of their interpretations in analysis. I then provide an overview of the themes identified across the participant group related to the three

superordinate themes: Being a TA and Role Perceptions; Applying Learning to Practice; Experiences and Perceptions of Inclusion.

Chapter five provides a discussion of the findings from the current study in relation to the research findings discussed in the literature review and the study's two main research questions, as outlined in chapter two.

Chapter six provides an overview of the conclusions of the study and make recommendations for future practice for both TAs and Educational Psychologists (EP), as well as recommendations for future research on the TA role. This chapter also provides a summary of the strengths and limitations of the current study and evaluates quality in relation to evaluative criteria presented by Yardley (2000).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter I review the research literature, theory and policy related to the study's aims outlined in chapter one. First I consider the historical and political context of the TA role in the UK related to the agendas for inclusive education and raising educational standards through workforce reforms. I then go on to outline and evaluate the findings of the deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project (Blatchford et al., 2006, 2009), a significant study relating to the TA role and impact. Subsequently I present the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model (Webster et al., 2011) which was developed by the authors of the DISS based on the project's findings. Thereafter I consider the components of the WPR model in relation to the current body of research pertaining to the factors which contribute to TA practice. I conclude by outlining the two key research questions for the current study.

Before beginning the review of the literature, I outline the search strategy I used to locate literature for this review.

2.1 Search Strategy

In order to find relevant literature I searched major bibliographical search engines including ETHOS, PsycINFO, ERIC, and the Web of Science. From this search I found books and articles from the disciplines of psychology, education, and sociology; all of which were printed in the English Language and the majority derived from the UK, USA, and Australia. Preference was given to studies published within the last 10 years or less as the TA role has developed considerably in this time.

The terms used in the searches included: (SEN OR ASD OR ASC OR Autis*); (Teaching Assistant * OR Learning Support Assistant*); (Effective* OR Role OR Use). I also employed the method of snowballing in which I found additional articles from the reference lists of articles found in searches, as well as articles which cited the key articles identified in my search. This has been shown to be an effective method of locating literature for a review (Jalali & Wohlin, 2012).

In line with the research questions of the current study, the literature most relevant to the TA role in supporting children identified as having SEN were included in the review.

2.2 Socio-political Context of the Introduction of the TA Role

The most recent statistics show that TAs make up over 25% of the school workforce and the number of TAs has tripled from 79,000 full time equivalent TAs employed by mainstream and special schools in England in 2000 to 255,000, as recorded by the most recent statistics in 2015 (DfE, 2015). This increase has been attributed to two different agendas within UK education; the inclusive education agenda and raising educational standards. In the remainder of this section I provide a brief outline of these agendas and consider some potential challenges for their reconciliation.

2.2.1 The Inclusive Education Agenda

The TA role has been central to the agenda for inclusive education and accommodating children in mainstream schools who would previously have been educated in specialist provision (Bedford, Jackson, & Wilson, 2008). The topic of inclusion has been gaining momentum since the Warnock report advocated for the integration of children identified with special needs into mainstream schools in 1978 (Warnock, 1979), which led to the Education Act in 1981 advocating a move towards integrated education (Goacher, 1988). In 1994, the UNESCO Salamanca statement urged governments to adopt inclusive values into law and policies. This was signed by 92 countries and aimed to *"adopt the principles of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools unless there are compelling reasons to do otherwise" (Unesco, 1994; p.54)*. This led to subsequent changes in national UK policy and legislation, including the National Strategies (DfES, 2002) and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice for 0-25 year olds (DfE, 2014). Some empirical evidence exists to demonstrate the 'effectiveness' of inclusion, both academically and socially (Gregor & Campbell, 2001; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001); however, the evidence base for the effectiveness of inclusion is inconclusive (Symes & Humphrey, 2012). Inclusive policy is more strongly driven by values and ideology, and the rights of children to access mainstream education than empirical evidence (Lindsay, 2007; Thomas, 1997). The recent Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (DfE, 2014) states that all children should be educated in mainstream provision unless the parents and child would like otherwise, or unless there is a detrimental impact on the education of the child or other pupils.

Inclusion is a difficult concept to define, and different conceptualisations are underpinned by differing theoretical perspectives of the experience of disability and SEN. At one extreme a biomedical conceptualisation views SEN in terms of individual deficit, whereby impairment reduces functionality and is a result of within-person, biological factors (Oliver, 1996a, 1996b). The social model challenges this conceptualisation and argues instead that people with impairments are disabled by the exclusion and social barriers they face to participation within mainstream society (Oliver, 1996a, 1996b; Shakespeare, 2006). Descriptions of inclusion informed by the social model focus on creating social change and changing the environment so it meets the needs of *all* children of the local population, including those categorised as having SEN. From this perspective, specific children would therefore not need additional support as the environment will have been adjusted to minimise barriers to their inclusion;

this has been referred to as *full inclusion* (Ainscow, 1995; Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006). Inclusion models informed by a more biomedical approach would seek to diagnose and categorise difficulties (such as a diagnosis of ASD), and then provide additional support to help the child to participate in the environment. This has been associated with the term *Special Educational Needs* (SEN) which categorises and diagnoses pupil deficit (Skrtic, 1995). The concept of SEN has been associated with *integration* rather than *inclusion* as pupils are categorised as having SEN and are then *integrated* within an existing system that pertains to the majority (children without SEN) rather than changing the system so it meets the needs of *all* children, without needing to identify SEN (Rix, 2015).

As Jones (2003) argues, real world complexity cannot be accurately captured within these binary categories, and to do so risks painting a caricature of the models, containing exaggerated and unchallenged assumptions. Disability is not simply created by social oppression as impairment itself can also contribute to reduced functioning (Williams, 1999). Disability is therefore more likely to be an *interaction* of individual impairment and social environment, rather than an *either/or* explanation (Shakespeare, 2006). Reindal (2008) argues that we need to go beyond this dichotomy and create an arena where education professionals can talk about *both* the individual needs of the child as well as the wider social context. Although there has been a strong move towards inclusion in policy, there can be a tension with the everyday practicalities (Sikes, Lawson, & Parker, 2007). As the TA role has developed as a means to support inclusion, inconsistency in definition of the concept may be linked to the lack of a clear and consistent role definition (Adamson, 1999; Blatchford, Webster, et al., 2012; Cajkler et al., 2007). The lack of a working definition can make it difficult for schools to implement and evaluate inclusion policies (Curcic, 2009; Harrower & Dunlap, 2001; Humphrey & Parkinson, 2006), and as the terms inclusion and integration are used interconnectedly this can make it difficult to compare findings in the research literature.

2.2.2 The Raising Standards Agenda

Increases in the number of TAs employed in schools over the past decade have also been attributed to workforce reform in the early 2000's (Blatchford, 2006; Saddler, 2014). This

reform called for "*more adults in the classroom and more time for teachers to plan and assess work"* (D. f. E. a. S. DfES, 2003 p. 40), and sought to lessen teachers' workload and improve teaching and learning standards, both of which were viewed to be inter-linked (Hammersley-Fletcher & Lowe, 2006); however, this increase in TA recruitment for this aim has been criticised as there was no evidence to suggest that the introduction of TAs would improve academic standards (Blatchford, Webster, et al., 2012). Ongoing evaluation of these standards has occurred through monitoring and assessment of pupil outcomes, primarily literacy and numeracy academic outcomes. This therefore provides a narrow focus of pupils' attainment and development which ignores their social, emotional, moral and physical development. Some authors have argued that in developing the workforce reforms, the government was more concerned about meeting their targets to reduce class sizes and the ratio between adults and pupils without incurring significant financial costs, rather than an altruistic aim to raise standards and help teachers (DfE, 2011; Hammersley-Fletcher & Adnett, 2009; Nash, 2014). Overall these reforms sit within the overarching aim of skilling up the future workforce in order to provide competition within a global economy (Wolf, 2002).

2.2.3 Two Competing Agendas?

Several authors have noted a tension between the focus on the raising standards agenda and the agenda for inclusive education (Ainscow & Miles, 2009; Saddler, 2014), and these competing agendas cannot exist side by side (Rix, 2015). As Saddler writes:

> *Whilst current educational policy is championing academic achievement as the ultimate goal, socially inclusive practices and interventions will remain undervalued.*
>
> Saddler, 2014; p.52

Ainscow and Miles (2009) argue that this focus on raising academic standards and productivity may help to explain why schools often seem somewhat reluctant to commit to the inclusion agenda (Ofsted, 2004), and why pupils continue to be excluded and marginalised from mainstream schools; pupils who are deemed low ability and need extra support may be unattractive to schools which prioritise raising academic standards in response to political pressure. Ainscow and colleagues (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006) completed an action research project between 1999 and 2003 in which small teams of

researchers supported schools within three local authorities to develop their inclusive policy and practice. These schools had not explicitly set out a commitment to the inclusive education agenda or expressed a desire to move in that direction and so the sample could be seen as typical to many schools with an ambivalence surrounding the concept of inclusion; although the authors did not note how many schools were involved in the study, which makes it difficult to know the scale of the study. Ainscow et al. (2006) found that in most schools, the two agendas were interwoven and there was no rejection of one in favour of another, although the presence of the standards agenda did appear to limit commitment to inclusion. Ainscow et al. (2006) also found that the standards agenda could also have a positive impact on the inclusion agenda as a focus on attainment helped teachers to focus on attainment of *all* pupils, including marginalised groups of pupils who may have otherwise been forgotten or subject to low expectations. This suggests that the debate about the compatibility of these two agendas is not clear cut. The same dangers of reductionism and dualism that Jones (2003) warns against in the debate surrounding inclusion can also be applied to the debate regarding the reconciliation of the agendas for inclusive education and raising standards agenda.

In conclusion to this brief discussion about the social political context for the introduction of the TA role it can be seen that the role is underpinned by complex and often competing ideology and policy. The TA role was introduced as a means to support inclusion, although what is meant by inclusion is unclear and can be based on two very different philosophical positions (social and individualist). In addition the TA role has been introduced as a means to raise standards and facilitate school improvement, with a focus on productivity and attainment, which can often conflict with the agenda for inclusive education. In order to reconcile the inclusive education debate, it has been suggested that an arena should be created for school staff to be able to discuss and challenge differing conceptualisations (Reindal, 2008), and this approach may also help to reconcile the agendas for inclusive education and raising standards.

2.3 The TA Role and Impact: the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) Project

Blatchford and Colleagues (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, et al., 2009) carried out the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff research project (DISS) which to date has been the largest study internationally on the TA role and effectiveness. The DISS project has been widely regarded as the most comprehensive study relating to TA practice and impact, and the study's validity and reliability has been highly regarded due to the multi-method approach and large sample size (Giangreco, 2010). The DISS has contributed to the research field pertaining to the evaluation of impact of the TA role, which Blatchford and colleagues described as "*one of the most important yet problematic aspects of research in this area*" (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, et al., 2009 p.2). This study therefore provides a key study in the literature on the TA role and practice and in this next section I outline the methodology and key findings of the study. I then go on to highlight some limitations of the DISS and evaluate the quality of the study based on the criteria to establish trustworthiness proposed by (Yardley, 2000).

The study consisted of two research strands: Strand 1 aimed to describe the TA role and Strand 2 aimed to examine the impact of TA support on both the academic attainment of pupils and their approach to learning. Data collection took place over several points and an overview of these methods can be viewed in figure 2.1.

Strand 1

Surveys

Three biennial large scale national questionnaires sent to mainstream and special schools. Responses from 6079 schools, 4091 teachers, and 7667 support staff, including 1864 (24 %) TAs.

Strand 2

Time logs

Support staff recorded which of 91 tasks they did every 20 minutes for one working day in the academic year 2005/06, respondents recorded duration of each task per 20 minute slot, 91 tasks were grouped into six categories for analysis. 1670 responses from individual support staff, including 310 (19%) from TAs.

Structured observations

27 TAs across 18 schools (nine primary; nine secondary) were shadowed for one day each. Predominant activities of teachers and TAs recorded every five minutes, with the context and the task, TAs and pupil observations took place in 140 lessons, both in and away from the classroom.

Systematic observations

686 pupils in Years 1, 3, 7 and 10 were observed for two days, across 49 schools (27 primary; 22 secondary). Observations of TA-to-pupil interactions made in English, mathematics and science lessons. 34,400 observations made in 10-second intervals

Case studies

Observations carried out in 65 mainstream and special schools (30 primary; 21 secondary; 14 special) 591 interviews conducted with: 65 school leaders; 105 teachers; 233 support staff (including 114 TAs); and 188 pupils (mainstream only).

Adult-to-pupil interaction

42 simultaneous digital voice recordings made of teacher-to-pupil and TA-to-pupil talk in lessons. 32 lesson-length transcripts used for analysis (16 teacher-to-pupil; 16 TA-to-pupil). Sample for analysis restricted to recordings made in English and maths lessons Utterances: 5226 teacher; 2295 TA.

Main pupil support survey (MPSS)

Survey of effects of TA support over a school year on pupils' Positive Approaches to Learning (PAL) (e.g., motivation, confidence) and academic progress of 8200 pupils across 153 schools: 2528 pupils and 76 schools in Wave 1; 5672 pupils and 77 schools in Wave 2 Seven year groups covered: Years 1, 3, 7 and 10 (in Wave 1) and Years 2, 6 and 9 (in Wave 2) PAL outcomes: teacher ratings of whether pupils' PAL had improved, remained unchanged or decreased. Academic progress outcomes: attainment at start and end of school year, based on Key Stage assessments, National Curriculum levels and teacher assessments. PAL and academic progress predictors: teacher estimates of amount of time TA support received.

Figure 2.1: DISS Data collection methods (Webster et al., 2011a p.6)

In Strand 1 data was gained from a number of sources using three surveys with a mixed method design: the Main School Questionnaire (MSQ), completed by 6079 school leaders; the Teacher Questionnaire (TQ) completed by 4091 teachers; and the Support Staff Questionnaire (SSQ), completed by 7667 support staff (24% of which were TAs). During Strand 2 data was gained from a range of sources within 153 schools including TAs, teachers and researcher observations, and employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collection methods included: completion of the Main Pupil Support Survey (MPSS), completed by teachers for 8200 pupils across 153 schools; time logs completed by school staff which detailed their engagement in daily activities and included 310 responses from TAs; systematic observations of 686 pupils within their school environment; and case studies of 65 schools, which focused on TA support. These studies comprised of structured observations of 27 TAs across 18 schools, 591 interviews with school staff, and 42 recordings of interactions between pupils and TAs (16) and teachers (16). A multiple regression analysis was employed to investigate whether the amount of TA support a child receives (as gained from the MPSS and structured observations) is predictive of their academic progress (as measured by national curriculum levels of predicted GCSE grades, reported by teachers on the MPSS) and their approach to learning (as measured by an approach to learning survey located within the MPSS). National Curriculum (NC) levels were previously set by the Department for Education to enable teachers to assess the academic level of the child in relation to the National Curriculum (DfE, 2016; as identified through matching academic work with level descriptors). The information from researcher observations and case study data was used to contextualise and infer meaning from the quantitative findings. Although the authors were not explicit about their theoretical underpinnings it seems from their prioritisation of quantitative data that the study was underpinned by realist ontology and positivist epistemology, which seeks to objectively understand objective truth (Howell, 2012).

2.3.1 Key Findings of the DISS

The key finding from strand 2 of the study demonstrated that the pupils who received the most TA support demonstrated poorer academic progress in English and maths. The study also found little evidence that increased TA support improved approaches to learning; a strong relationship between TA support received and outcomes on the Positive Approaches

to Learning questionnaire was found for pupils in year 9, although it is not clear why this only applied for this year group. Blatchford et al. (2009) concluded that the key finding of the DISS study can be explained by the paradox that children with the highest level of need receive support from the least qualified adult. TAs were most likely to work on a 1:1 basis with pupils in the classroom and they spent approximately one third of their time working away from the class room with low ability pupils and those identified with SEN. Latchford et al. (2009) therefore concluded that support staff may act as a barrier to children accessing direct teacher support, and there may be a lack of clarity about who is accountable for pupils' progress.

Findings demonstrated that TAs were largely unprepared for their role; 75 per cent of teachers reported that they did not have any planning time with TAs, and communication between the two was mostly on an ad hoc basis. Blatchford et al. (2009) noted that schools often rely on the goodwill of TAs and their willingness to work extra unpaid hours in order to make time for planning with teachers; 82% of TAs reported that they worked extra hours, for which they were not paid, and only 40% of TAs reported that they are likely to be paid for working over their contracted hours. TAs were also unprepared as a result of a lack of training opportunities; school staff, including both TAs and managers, reported that they were not satisfied with the amount of training on offer to TAs, and TAs' subject knowledge was mostly gained through on the job experience rather than through training. Blatchford and colleagues (2009) argued that these factors contributed to ineffective TA practice. Findings from the audio recordings of TA and pupil and TA and teacher interactions demonstrate that teachers spent more time explaining concepts, whereas TAs descriptions were often inaccurate or the TA directly answered the pupil's questions rather than encouraging them to think of the answer for themselves. The authors concluded that these factors explain the findings that the more TA support a pupil received, the less academic progress they made.

2.3.2 Evaluating Quality of the DISS

The focus of the DISS on academic progress, could be considered to present a narrow view of child development and overall progress as it does not consider their social, emotional, and moral development (Balshaw, 2010; Fletcher-Campbell, 2010; Saddler, 2014). Blatchford et al. (2009) do appear to recognise this narrow focus in their title for the model, which specifies that the model is related specifically to a *pedegogical* role. They also argue that their focus on academic attainment and approaches to learning was a direct attempt to address the methodological limitations of the existing research, which employed designs based on the anecdotal perspectives of school staff, and did not seek to understand impact (Blatchford et al., 2009). However, as discussed previously, TAs have been introduced to promote inclusion in general, impact should therefore be judged against a range of potential outcomes not just academic progress (Balshaw, 2010; Fletcher-Campbell, 2010). TAs have themselves reported that these narrow views of progress lack meaning for the pupil and do not capture their holistic development, which places constraints on their practice (Cozens, 2014). National Curriculum levels may also not be sensitive enough to capture small amounts of progress made by pupils; in the interviews conducted by Blatchford et al. (2009), 60% of TAs said that they would like progress to be measured in a broader way to capture smaller changes, which they viewed as especially important for pupils identified with SEN. This could suggest that TAs may have more of an impact on pupil progress than the findings suggest.

A second limitation of the DISS relates to differing constructions of the term special educational needs, as was briefly explored in section 2.2. The categories of SEN used by Blatchford and colleagues are based on the categories of need suggested by the previous Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (DfES, 2001), for schools to categorise the amount of *support* a pupil requires; for example, pupils identified as *school action* are deemed to require support that can be offered within the school's existing resources, and those identified as *school action plus* are deemed to require support over and above the internal support a school can provide. This would suggest that the terms *SEN* and *support* are not as clearly defined as the study suggests; as well as reflecting pupils' individual need, SEN categories may also be indicative of the school's existing resources to meet pupil need, and this has environmental and social consideration has not been captured within the DISS. Blatchford and colleagues present SEN only as a 'within pupil' characteristic, which does not take into account how, from the perspective of the social model, the child's environment or

indeed the categorisation of SEN in itself can contribute to difficulties and disabilities (Balshaw, 2010; Fletcher-Campbell, 2010).

A third limitation of the DISS relates to the nature of *nomothetic* research. Nomothetic research aims to generalise findings to the wider population based on attempts to understand general experience. The DISS has been regarded as a comprehensive and robust study due to its large sample size and assumptions about the generalisability of findings (Giangreco, 2010); however, this strength can also be considered a limitation. In total 591 interviews with school staff were conducted which lends itself to a shallow and broad analysis as it would not be possible to consider each individual's perspective in depth. Nomothetic research has been criticised for applying to everyone and no one and so the same could be said of the DISS research. *Idiographic* research on the other hand attempts to understand the unique experience of individuals and uses a smaller sample size in order to give each individual's perspective adequate attention and understand underlying processes. It is not possible for all research to be all things, and without this large sample size and the reliability this creates, the authors would not have had the confidence to develop the WPR model of TA practice (Webster et al., 2011a), which was based on these findings. However, it is important to consider the findings of the DISS in relation to research which considers TA experiences holistically and in more depth; this is discussed further in relation to the WPR model of TA effectiveness in the next section.

The DISS study has been widely regarded as an important study in the field (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; Giangreco, 2010; N'jie, 2014; Nash, 2014; Saddler, 2014), and the findings have contributed to a website, several books, and widely cited research papers, as well as making news headlines (Saddler, 2014). As mentioned, the findings from the study were also used to develop the Wider Pedagogical Role model; a model for TA effectiveness. The DISS can therefore be considered to have had a sizeable impact; however, Fletcher-Campbell (2010) notes that this impact has not necessarily translated to changes in policy and legal documents. Webster (2014) argues that the recent Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (DfE, 2014) has taken recent research developments into account in its restraint in discussions about the TA role, although this has not been made explicit in the documentation.

Yardley's (2000) four evaluative criteria can be used to evaluate the quality of this research. These criteria include: *sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence*; and *impact*. These criteria can apply to a broad range of methodologies, and I have used them in chapter six to evaluate the methods and findings from the current study. As applied to the DISS study I argue that the DISS has demonstrated:

- *Sensitivity to context* in that it takes into account the raising standards agenda and has a focus on academic outcomes, although consideration of the TAs role in relation to inclusion and social and emotional development is more limited.

- *Commitment and rigour* in its large and comprehensive sample, which increases reliability and generalisability of the findings (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2003).

- *Transparency and coherence* as the extensive findings have been organised into a coherent narrative about TA effectiveness. Detailed accounts of the project's research methods were also outlined in several published papers and books (Blatchford, 2006; Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, et al., 2009; Blatchford, Russell, et al., 2012).

- *High impact* on the research field and media.

In conclusion it can be seen that the DISS project provides a key study in the field of the TA role and practice.

2.4 Factors Contributing to TA Practice

In this section I begin by outlining the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR) model for effective TA practice which was developed by Webster and colleagues (Webster et al., 2011a), based on their findings from the DISS project. I then discuss two recent studies which provide support for the model, before going on to examine each component of the model in more depth, in consideration of recent research findings on the TA role and practice.

2.4.1 The TA's Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR)

The WPR model was developed by Webster and colleagues (Webster et al., 2011a) as a model for effective TA practice, based on the findings from the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project (Blatchford et al., 2009). The WPR is presented in figure 2.1 and depicts five different components integral to the effective practice of TAs.

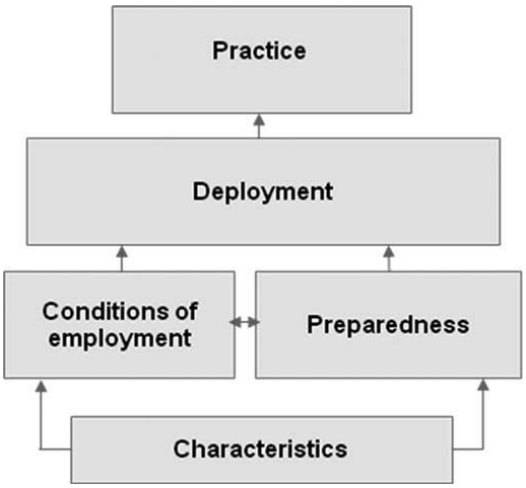

Figure 2.2: Model of the Wider Pedagogical Role (WPR; Webster et al., 2011)

In line with findings and interpretations made in the DISS (Blatchford et al., 2009), the WPR proposes that factors related to the school system (TA deployment, conditions of employment, and preparedness) and factors related to the TA themselves (TA characteristics) influence their interactions with the pupil (TA practice). These components will be discussed in the following section in more detail, however in summary the components include:

- ***TA characteristics*** which refers to the level of qualification held by TAs.
- ***Conditions of employment*** which refers to TA pay and ensuring that TAs and teachers are given adequate time to communicate and work together.
- ***Preparedness*** which relates to the training and professional development opportunites available to TAs, and the level of planning and joint working between the TA and the class teacher.
- ***Deployment*** which refers to the way in which TAs are placed within the school system to support teachers and pupils; for example this might be to deliver 1:1 support or group interventions.

- ***Practice*** which relates to the nature and quality of TA interactions with pupils and opening up discussions about learning.

Webster and colleagues (2011) aimed to provide a conceptualisation of the TA role that would explain their key finding from the DISS study; that the more TA support a pupil receives the less academic progress they make. As the model is developed from a focus on deficit it could therefore be viewed as generally negative, which communicates failures rather than being based on the strengths of school systems and TAs. However, the model itself encourages schools to support TAs in order to promote TA practice, which can be viewed as strength building. In developing the model, the authors have attempted to place responsibility for TA effectiveness with school leaders, rather than with the TA themselves, and the TA role is located within the context of the wider school system.

Support for the WPR Model

Two studies (Cockroft & Atkinson, 2015; N'jie, 2014) have explored TA perceptions of the WPR model as it relates to their practice and have found support for the WPR model. Cockroft and Atkinson (2015) asked TAs about their perceptions of their role in relation to the model. Focus groups were completed with eight TAs in one school, using a single case study design study (Yin, 1994). Cockroft and Atkinson (2015) concluded that the WPR is a useful framework from which to explore potential barriers and facilitators of effective practice for TAs. However, what is meant by 'effective practice' was not defined and discussed as part of this research. Cockcroft and Atkinson (2015) identified facilitators and barriers across all aspects of the WPR; of particular note, TAs reported that *characteristics* and *conditions of employment* were the least important aspects of the model with regard to their practice, which is in line with the views of Webster et al. (2011) and Blatchford et al. (2009). Cockroft and Atkinson's (2015) main criticism of the WPR model was that it did not consider how each of the factors in the model interacts with the others. However, this same limitation can also be applied to the research of Cockcroft and Atkinson (2015) as they did not explore reasons for TAs' claims, which resulted in a descriptive study with a lack of depth.

Support for the WPR model can be also found in the findings from the study by N'jie (2014), which explored both TA and pupil perceptions of TA support in primary schools. Four focus groups were completed with TAs and pupils (one for TAs and one for pupils across two

different schools), and the question schedule was based on the five different components of the WPR model. N'jie's (2014) comparison with findings from Blatchford et al. (2009) demonstrated that N'jie's findings were concordant with eleven out of fourteen elements of the WPR. These included TAs adopting a direct instructional role, usually on a 1:1 basis with low ability pupils, a general lack of communication with class teachers and possession of limited subject knowledge. Findings contradicted aspects of the WPR in relation to the view that TAs prioritise task completion over learning, and some TAs felt supported by their direct line managers. N'jie (2014) found that at least one TA reported that they made a point of coming in on their own time in order to communicate with the class teacher, which provides support for the *conditions of employment* component of the WPR, and the recommendation that schools should give TAs adequate paid time in order to promote collaboration. Findings from the pupil focus groups suggested that pupils' perceptions of the TA role and TA support took on a more pragmatic nature. Pupil perceptions focused on who the TAs were, what they do, and why they have a presence in the classroom. N'jie (2014) concluded that these findings generally concurred with the findings of Blatchford et al. (2009), specifically with regard to the 1:1 deployment of TAs with lower ability children, taking on an instructional role, the good will of TAs and the importance of individual TA characteristics.

These findings provide some evidence for the validity of the WPR model. However, it should be noted that the two studies discussed in this section were designed with the model in mind; both used the framework of the model in their interview schedules for the focus groups and both used the framework to inform analysis of this data, albeit in different ways. The deductive nature of these studies limits their ability to find anything about TA practice beyond the WPR model. Despite this, both studies found from their deductive research more evidence to support the model than refute it. Although these studies are limited in scope and only offer the perceptions of TAs and pupils, they provide some emergent evidence that the WPR may provide a useful perspective from which to begin to conceptualise TA practice.

2.4.2 TA Characteristics

A major difference between the conclusions of Cockroft and Atkinson (2015) and N'jie (2014) are in their views about the influence individual TA characteristics have on TA practice;

Cockroft and Atkinson (2015) concluded that TAs attach little importance to their individual characteristics in relation to their practice, which is in line with the WPR model (Webster et al., 2011). On the other hand, N'jie (2014) argues that that consideration of TA characteristics by the WPR is 'tokenistic', and that they have more of an influence than the authors give credit. The DISS and WPR also only include level of qualifications in their consideration of characteristics. N'jie (2014) found that TAs emphasised the importance of personal and gender stereotyped characteristics, such as adaptability, flexibility and a caring and nurturing nature, as important to being a 'good TA'. Pupils also identified that positive TA characteristics were important, such as being helpful, flexible and fair. This suggests that certain TA characteristics may have more influence on effective TA practice than the authors of The WPR propose.

N'jie (2014) completed further research on the impact of gender on TA practice using a multi-method design including observations, interviews and an online survey with nine male TAs working across one local authority. This produced useful and in depth data about the experiences of male TAs and their perceptions regarding gender. Most of the TAs talked about differences existing between male and female TAs, and the contribution of male TAs was talked about in terms of being additional to what a female TA can offer. Interestingly N'jie noted that at times participants would verbalise that they did not believe in the existence of gender stereotypes, although they would then go on to highlight what the author interpreted as a gender stereotype somewhere else in the interview (for example, attribution of certain school subjects to a gender). N'jie notes that this suggests an implicit acceptance of gender stereotypes.

This difference between the findings of Cockroft and Atkinson (2015) and N'jie (2014) may reflect differences in methodology between the two studies. Cockroft and Atkinson (2015) took a wholly deductive approach to data analysis in relation to themes provided by the components of the WPR, on the other hand N'jie (2014) initially took an inductive approach in thematic analysis and then used elements of the WPR, against which they then compared these inductive themes. The initial inductive analysis in N'jie's study may have provided more space for consideration of the role of TA characteristics outside of those specified by the research of Blatchford et al., (2009) which as discussed was itself limited. Secondly, N'jie

(2014) employed an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in the second phase of the study which explored the lived experiences of male TAs. Through this in depth method of data collection and analysis, N'jie (2014) was able to go beyond the explicit assertions of participants and interpret meaning underlying what was explicitly said, which suggested that participants may not be aware as to how gender (or TA characteristics) might impact on the TA role. N'jie notes that half of the sample did not believe that gender impacted on TA practice, and made the decision not to include this latter finding for discussion; as the theme was not highlighted for all cases, it was regarded as less relevant than the other themes. This omission does not fit with the idiographic and phenomenological focus of IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It would have been interesting to know more about this finding as it may provide further evidence for my own interpretation that TAs may not always be aware of how their own characteristics can influence practice.

It is possible that the individual influence of TAs has been downplayed in development of the WPR in an effort to avoid directly blaming TAs for the negative results relating to pupil academic outcomes. Instead, the WPR places responsibility for the outcomes of TA support firmly with the school system and not with the TA themselves. Whilst this de-personalises the finding that TA support can lead to poorer outcomes for pupils, it avoids consideration of the role individual characteristics might play in TA practice. It also suggests that TAs are passive agents and do little to shape their own role, which could be potentially disempowering for TAs. This demonstrates further how the WPR has been influenced by the narrow and deficit focus of the DISS.

2.4.3 TA Training

The WPR recommends that training is essential in order to help TAs be more prepared for their role and to foster effective practice. This is in line with government guidance, which clearly outlines that training for all staff working with children with SEN is crucial for inclusive practice, and teaching and learning (DfE, 2014; DfES, 2002). Despite these recommendations it appears not all TAs receive training in practice. Brown and Devecchi (2013) completed a study using a mixed method design which explored the impact of TA training on the TA role. In the first phase of the study 243 TAs and 23 continuing professional development (CPD)

managers (mostly Head Teachers) completed a survey which asked questions about the TA role, the type of training they have received and the perceived impact of this training on the TA role. These findings demonstrated that 81% of TAs had the opportunity to engage in some training since beginning work as a TA. Brown and Devecchi (2013) point out that this means that one fifth of TAs in the study had received no training, and although these TAs are in the minority, this presents a concern, especially in light of their own findings that training was viewed as beneficial to practice. In the qualitative phase of the study by Brown and Devecchi (2013), 15 TAs and 8 CPD managers were asked about their perceptions of role and training in more detail, using semi-structured interviews. Findings suggested that training impacted on TAs' ability and practice in a number of ways including: supporting learning, supporting and managing behaviour, supporting specific needs, and communicating with pupils. As Brown and Devecchi (2013) themselves note, it was difficult to draw conclusions in this study about perceived impact of training as the participants talked about a wide range of different types of training for a wide range of different roles. However the study does highlight that training seems to be broadly valued by the TAs and CPD managers who took part.

Training also appears to help TAs to develop their understanding of specific needs, develop their practice and build their confidence. Peters and Scott-Roberts (2014) interviewed three parents and three TAs; they asked them about their perceptions of the EarlyBird Plus (EBP) program for ASD and the impact they believe it had on the school. TAs reported that their knowledge of autism increased, they better understood underlying reasons for pupils' behaviour, and felt an increase in confidence following their attendance at the program. TAs also reported that they developed new strategies to work with the child, specifically with regard to communication. TAs and parents both reported that home and school became more consistent in their use of strategies, and that they had noticed improvements for the child in response to application of the programme at home and at school, although they did not say what these improvements were or how they knew that the child had improved. In this study TAs were interviewed alongside parents and therefore unlikely to talk about difficulties they might have experienced in supporting the child. The authors also note that data was only included if the same themes had been identified in two or more interviews. This approach would likely have missed more idiosyncratic information about individual experiences at

different time points, which would be important information considering the divergence in TAs' roles and potential divergence in their experiences.

Conversely, Symes and Humphrey (2011a, 2011b) suggest that TAs did not find training particularly useful for their role. They interviewed fifteen TAs from four secondary schools in the UK and found that TAs in the sample received differing levels of training. TAs reported that they did not find generic ASD training useful; instead they believed that previous experience of working with pupils with ASD was more important, although TAs felt that this experience was not often valued by others. This contradicts the WPR's emphasis on training rather than learning 'on the job', as this suggests that some TAs may prefer to learn from experience. The WPR does not seem to consider the worth of on the job experience which corroborates with the views of TAs in this study that their experience may not be valued. Symes and Humphrey (2011a) report that this research was conducted within a phenomenological philosophy as the research aim was to understand the participants lived experience; however, this research does not keep the individual experiences of TAs intact in their analysis and write up of interview data. Firstly they analyse themes across participants by employing thematic analysis, and secondly they appear to have split interview data from the same participants across two separate research papers (2011a and 2011b). The individual and phenomenological experience of TAs has therefore been fragmented and it is not possible to make links within individual TA experience. This suggests a lack of consistency between the methods employed and the underpinning philosophical perspective and also a lack of transparency with regard to the origin of interview data, both of which jeopardises the validity of the study (Yardley, 2000).

The application of training in practice can also be problematic. Higgins and Gulliford (2014) completed focus groups with fourteen TAs to explore their application of knowledge gained from training in the delivery of an anger management intervention. They found that application of knowledge from training in practice was influenced by the TAs' first-hand experience, and learning from the experience of others. This highlights the importance of work experience as well as training, in line with the findings of Symes and Humphrey (2011a and 2011b). The beliefs TAs held about the potential outcomes of training, and the TAs own emotional state also influenced application of training. Higgins and Gulliford (2014) concluded

that the TAs' beliefs about their own abilities and knowledge can impact on their self-efficacy (their beliefs in their own ability to complete a task effectively; Bandura, 1994), which can in turn impact on their behaviour and practice. TAs' self-efficacy was influenced by their own beliefs and values, by the relationship the TA had with the child, and how empowered they felt to apply learning within the context in which they work. TAs believed contextual factors empowered them to apply training, and these included the development of norms around the intervention, adequate resources, allocation of time, and feeling valued by others. This suggests that training links to other components identified in the WPR such as TA-teacher communication and conditions of employment. However, Higgins and Gulliford (2014) do not explore how these factors impact on application of training to practice; for example, about what values might be particularly relevant or how values might shape practice. Higgins and Gulliford (2014) raise the key point that a direct link cannot be assumed between training and application to practice, as is assumed by the WPR. Factors related to an interaction between the TA and the context in which they work will impact on how the TA is able to apply training in practice.

2.4.4 Collaboration between the TA and the Class Teacher

The WPR recommends that TAs and class teachers should engage in collaborative practice in order for TAs to feel prepared in their role and to promote effective TA practice. This was based on the findings from the DISS that 75 per cent of teachers reported that they did not have any planning time with TAs and communication between the two was mostly on an ad hoc basis. Previous research has consistently highlighted the importance of collaboration and communication between TAs and class teachers in the classroom (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, et al., 2009; Cozens, 2014; Lehane, 2016; Mackenzie, 2011; Nash, 2014; Saddler, 2014; Symes & Humphrey, 2011a, 2011b; Webster et al., 2011a).

Collaboration between the TA and the class teacher has been shown to increase TAs' sense of agency. Docherty (2014) interviewed six TAs about the support they offered pupils using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology. TAs viewed communication with the class teacher as essential to their practice and this facilitated the TAs' sense of personal agency (Docherty, 2014). These findings were interpreted in relation to Vygotsky's

theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978). Docherty (2014) argues that a when a pupil is supported by one adult, the adult is engaged with both the task as well as with helping the pupil to learn that task through mediation; however, when support for a pupil comes from two different adults the teacher is most engaged with the task and the TA most engaged with the child, and this results in a disconnection between the task and the mediation. The TAs disconnection from the task can therefore make it difficult for TAs to act as a mediator and understand how the pupil is learning, understand the appropriate level of challenge required, and help to motivate the pupil. Docherty (2014) therefore argues that communication between the TA and the teacher is essential in order to heal this disconnect and effectively facilitate mediated learning. This study was based solely on the experiences of TAs and it would be important to also understand the experiences of the teacher in order to provide support for this theory. However, this provides and interesting psychological insight into why communication is consistently viewed as important to TA practice.

It has also been suggested that collaboration between the TA and teacher has benefits for pupils and the class teacher. In the study by Symes and Humphrey (2011b) TAs reported that collaboration with other professionals was important to the inclusion of pupils as they were able to respond to pupils' changing needs. Poor communication between staff meant that TAs felt that they were not able to adhere to strategies which had been put in place by other professionals. This was also supported by Cozens (2014) who completed three focus groups with a total of twelve TAs (eleven female and one male) using an appreciative inquiry (AI) methodology. This study aimed to investigate what TAs described as the most effective and positive aspects of their role, what they regard as ideal practice and what they would like to improve. TAs believed communication with the class teacher helped them to target their support to meet the needs of the pupil. However, it was unclear from this study how this presented in practice and the process by which communication helped them to better meet pupils' needs. It will be important for this to be considered in future research in order to improve TA-teacher communication.

Despite these obvious benefits, tensions have been identified regarding collaborative working in practice. Mackenzie (2011) interviewed ten TA participants, who attended focus groups alongside other members of school staff. Three individual semi-structured, life history

interviews were then completed with different TAs who were enrolled on the same degree course as the author. Some TAs reported that collaborative practice with the class teacher was often difficult; however, they did not give explanations as to why this might be. The authors presented themes as five separate case studies and it was unclear whether these case studies represented individual participants or whether the stories are an amalgamation of findings from different participants. The presentation of findings per individual case also seems to be incongruent with the data collection method of focus groups, which collects information from a group of participants, rather than detailed data for individual participants. If interviews had been employed instead of focus groups this would have facilitated an idiographic understanding of barriers to collaborative practice, more in line with the presentation of findings. This finding is consistent with the findings of Blatchford et al. (2009) and the WPR model (Webster et al., 2011b), which suggest that although TA and teacher collaboration is an important aspect of helping TAs to feel prepared for their role, it does not often happen in practice. These findings were also replicated in a study by Lehane (2016) who interviewed eight TAs about their perceptions of their work and utilised a Conversational Discourse Analysis methodology. TAs reported that they often did not feel involved in lesson planning, communication with the class teacher was usually "on the hoof", and TAs believed that the responsibility for communication with the class teacher fell to them rather than the class teacher. This study was completed in a secondary setting and the findings may not apply to a primary setting where the TA and class teacher spend more time together, which would likely provide more opportunities to develop a relationship. One reason for this tension has been attributed to a lack of time in the school day for TAs and teachers to meet. Blatchford et al. (2009) note that the goodwill of TAs to work additional hours, which are often unpaid, is often relied upon in order to make time for this collaboration.

The relationship between the TA and the class teacher has also been highlighted as an important factor in effective communication and collaboration. TAs in the study by Symes and Humphrey (2011a) demonstrated considerable variation in their accounts of their relationship with the class teacher; some TAs reported that teachers did not seem to like having them in the class room, whereas others reported that their relationship with the class teacher improved with time. TAs in the study by Lehane (2016) also noted that the relationship with the teacher was central to the quality of communication they shared with

them. Nash (2014) explored TA and class teacher relationships from the perspective of eight TAs using semi-structured interviews. TAs reported that personal characteristics have an important impact on the TA-teacher relationship, and Nash (2014) notes that although this might be expected for all working relationships, this may be especially relevant for TAs and teachers who work together in isolation for much of the day in a confined classroom. This further highlights the role individual TA and teacher characteristics can potentially have on TA practice.

TA Status and Power

Power dynamics have been highlighted as a major barrier to collaborative working. Saddler (2014) explored the management of TAs using a multiple case study design across three schools; this incorportaed a wide range of methods including: observations; semi-structured interviews with twenty-five school staff (including TAs); and documentary analysis. School staff reported feelings of unease with the low status of TAs with many advocating for equal status between both TAs and teachers. Saddler (2014) suggested that, compared to teachers, TAs seemed more equal to pupils and this closeness seemed to distinguish their role from the role of a more authoritative teacher. This is suggestive of a hierarchy with the teacher at the top and pupils and TAs together at the bottom. Some TAs in the study also spoke about their discomfort when teachers used their status to control the actions of TAs. As Saddler (2014) included three different schools in the study this would suggest that these issues of status and power are not only related to power dynamics in one school system. This study used a comprehensive approach to both data collection and analysis through utilising a comparative data analysis, which compared and contrasted data from each different data source; this included the voices of teachers, managers, TAs and pupils. However, the views of different school staff were not separated out and so it was not possible to unpick how status was viewed by different professionals.

The issue of TA status was also highlighted by Cozens (2014). Some TAs in this study experienced anxiety in relation to their perceived lower status and this presented a barrier to effective communication. However, some TAs believed that their status was higher than that of teachers with regard to specific knowledge about the pupil and sensitivity to individual needs. Lehane (2016) also identified that TAs often believed that the class teacher with whom

they worked most closely often did not hold the same level of ideals with regard to inclusion as the TA did, which suggests that TAs views themselves as specialist in some way. However, as Lehane (2016) notes, all the TAs in the sample apart from one, were studying a university course on inclusive education. This finding may therefore not be typical for the majority of TAs. Saddler (2014) suggests role blurring between teachers and TAs, with regard to responsibilities for pupil progress, seemed to be especially apparent where TAs were over-qualified for their role. Saddler (2014) did not clarify what over qualification meant although it is possible that this is linked to having a higher status than the teacher in some way. This relates to the literature on TA training and suggests that knowledge and training may actually contribute to barriers to effective collaboration with class teachers, and therefore impact negatively on TA practice. Saddler (2014) identified role blurring to be a barrier to collaborative working, which as Nash (2014) highlights may be a result of teachers feeling threated, as TAs reported that class teachers like to maintain overall control in the classroom. With regard to legislation which places accountability for pupils' firmly at the feet of teachers (DfE, 2014) it seems unsurprising teachers would want to maintain control in the classroom.

Collaboration between TAs and class teachers appears to be most effective when they have clearly defined and mutually agreed roles, and when contributions are respected and valued (Saddler, 2014; Cozens, 2014), where both the TA and class teacher accept the hierarchy and are committed to working together as part of a team (Nash, 2014), and where the TA and teacher are given time to meet in the school day (Blatchford et al, 2009; Cozens, 2014). This highlights the importance of guidelines about how the roles of the teacher and TA can fit together, including building in time in the school day for adequate planning time, which links to the WPR's component *conditions of employment.* It is also important to recognise that factors contributing to TA and teacher collaboration go beyond the classroom, and the attitude of senior leaders can be pivotal in how TAs are included and valued within the school system (Nash, 2014). Collaboration in the classroom may also be linked to how TAs are more generally included as professionals within the school system and in this next section I consider how marginalisation may impact negatively on working relationships with teachers.

Marginalisation of TAs

Working relationships between TAs and teachers may be negatively influenced by the alignment of TAs with the children with whom they work, rather than being aligned with the teacher as a professional. Nash (2014) made the interesting interpretation that TAs are treated as children in the classroom:

> *[TAs are] passive listeners who are being asked to carry out learning activities, rather than adult partners who along with the teacher can make a proactive contribution to helping children learn.*
>
> (Nash, 2014; p.99)

This implies that this power imbalance makes it difficult for TAs not only to be equal on a professional level but also equal on an adult to adult level, which is likely to impact collaborative relationships between TAs and teachers. It may also link to TAs feelings of unease when they perceive that the teacher uses their status as a teacher and power as an adult over them (Saddler, 2014). Lehane (2016) also reflected that the TAs in their study often seemed to be aligned with the child with SEN and believe they received the same stigmatisation that the child identified with SEN often receives within the school system. Lehane (2016) argued that this contributed to a view of themselves as somehow 'lesser' than other members of staff. This puts the TA into the position of an 'other' and not included fully within the school system. It is possible that this sense of otherness and alignment with the pupil is exacerbated by 1:1 methods of TA deployment, which has been referred to as *velcroing* (Giangreco, 2010), suggesting that the TA and pupil are stuck together (see section 2.4.5). Some TAs in the study by Mackenzie (2011) reported that they themselves felt excluded within the school system, and TAs reported that supporting children with SEN could be physically and emotionally demanding and TAs often felt isolated. One TA in the study by Mackenzie (2011) attributed this sense of marginalisation to the challenges of working in an all-female environment. It would have been interesting for the authors to have explored this sense of isolation further and possible links between supporting marginalised pupils and feelings of exclusion within the wider schools system.

Findings from the study by N'jie (2014) suggests that TAs can feel disempowered due to feeling that they do not have a voice. Lehane (2016) provides a critique of the DISS project

from this perspective, and points out that TAs were not included in the DISS working group, although teachers, SENCos and head teachers were. Although the WPR highlights the importance of the relationship between the TA and the teacher, this is in the context of preparing the TA for their role rather than considering how TAs might be valued and included as part of the school system. The WPR also does not consider how classroom relationships may be impacted by wider systemic issues as well as issues of status and power. TAs also seem to be portrayed in the model as a resource to be deployed by schools; this links to a pattern identified whereby researchers often talk about "effective utilisation" of TAs which can leave TAs feeling like a commodity and can feel disempowering (Lehane, 2016; O'Brien & Garner, 2001). Several authors (Cozens, 2014; Lehane, 2016) have noted that the findings about negative impact of TA support from studies such Blatchford et al., (2009) can make TAs a vulnerable group, with little or no voice.

2.4.5 Deployment and Practice

The authors of the DISS and WPR (Blatchford et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2011) argue that a combination of 1:1 deployment of TAs and a lower quality of teaching delievered by TAs compared to class teachers can mean that TAs act as a barrrier to learning. Webster et al. (2011) argued that this explained the finding in the DISS that pupils receiving a high level of TA support demonstarted poorer academic outcomes. The WPR argues that School leaders and class teachers should consider how TAs are deployed so that the pupil is also able to access support from the class teacher.

The body of research on the TA role suggests that the 1:1 form of deployment can situate the TA's role 'in between' the pupil whom they are supporting and the pupil's environment. Some have suggested that the TA may act as an 'intermediary' between the child and their environment in an attempt to promote inclusion and help them to cope with the demands of mainstream schooling. Alborz, Pearson, Farrell, and Howes (2009) completed a systematic review of the literature on the impact of TA support on the participation and learning of pupils in mainstream schools. 35 studies were included in the review and the

authors conclude that the TAs can act as an intermediary between the child and aspects of their environment, such as the class teacher, learning, and peers; however they do not detail what this might look like in practice, how it may impact pupil outcomes and how this is experienced by the TA. Drawing on writings by the sociologist Goffman (1959, cited in Lehane 2016), Lehane (2016) interpreted the TA as a 'go between' where they are required to balance their loyalties between the teacher and child, and meet the needs of each. Findings from the DISS suggest that the TA may actually present as a 'barrier' between the child and the teacher (Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Martin, et al., 2009), which seems counter-productive to the aims of inclusion, and this has implications for educational equity. Blatchford et al. (2009) suggested that TA input often replaces the input from teachers, which contributes to poorer academic outcomes. They argued that the pupil was not able to access quality teaching time as they observed that pupils spent less time with a class teacher when a TA was present; however, as discussed, identified limitations with regard to the DISS study challenge the validity of the key findings. Despite these limitations the finding that the pupils spent less time with teachers when a TA was present creates questions about the equity of education for pupils with SEN and whether they are fully included in the range of educational opportunities open to pupils without a label of SEN (Giangreco, 2010).

Webster (2014) argues that 1:1 deployment is a hangover from Statements of Special Educational Need (DfES, 2001), which detailed a prescribed number of hours of TA support for pupils identified with SEN. Webster (2014) argues that this could pose as a barrier to more creative solutions to problems associated with inclusive education. This echoes Giangreco's (2010) view that the whole system needs to be changed rather than simply focusing on improving TA support. This therefore suggests that a narrow focus on the practicalities of TA practice may distract from the bigger issue of inclusive education and the expectation that schools should change to meet the needs of the child. In the study by Nash (2014) TAs often talked about their role as filling a gap or providing something that is missing in the classroom. Nash notes that it was unclear from the findings whether the TA acted as 'a bridge or a wedge', and this links to the debate about whether the presence of TAs helps to mediate or whether it creates a barrier. This finding suggests that TAs may be picking up the inclusion slack in the school system; rather than schools changing to meet the needs of the pupil, TAs appear to fill that gap and help the pupil to adapt to fit with the

demands of school. Discourses about TA effectiveness without consideration of the inclusive ethos of the school may therefore distract from the changes schools could be making to the wider environment in order to benefit *all* pupils.

The aims of TA practice highlighted throughout this review have been linked to teaching and inclusion. These key aims relate to the two key education agendas which underpinned the introduction of the TA role as discussed in section 2.2. As Blatchford and colleagues (Blatchford, 2006; Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, et al., 2009) highlight, the adoption of a teaching role for TAs can blur the boundaries between delivering teaching and offering support and the boundaries between the professional roles of teachers and TAs. Giangreco (2010) argues that there is no existing evidence convincing enough to advocate for TAs having a direct pedagogical role. The DISS highlighted that TA practice was often ineffective in terms of delivering teaching strategies and whilst the WPR does advocate for alternative forms of deployment, it does not negate the influence TAs can have on pupils learning. The WPR advocates for more training and collaboration in order to support TA practice and help TAs to scaffold pupil's learning. These aspects of the model have been previously discussed in sections 2.4.2 and 2.4.3 respectively, although there is a dearth of research which explores how training and collaberation impact specifically on TA-pupil interactions.

This assumption that TAs should support learning is implicitly underpinned by sociocultural learning theories. These theorise that learning is constructed through a social process between the learner and a mediator, rather than through the learner passively receiving information from the teacher (Feuerstein & Rand, 1974; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1978)* can be defined as the distance between what the learner can do independently and what they can do with the support of a more able other. New learning builds upon previous learning, therefore extending what they can do independently. This gives rise to the educational concept of 'scaffolding' (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), which refers to the process of providing a structure for tasks so the pupil is able to independently complete as much of that task as possible. Various levels of assistance are offered through different levels of task difficulty and the child is encouraged to complete as much of the task independently and support is then provided for them to problem solve.

This support is gradually decreased as the pupil takes on more independent responsibility, a processes termed as 'fading' (Van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). Although this theory makes it clear that the presence of a more able other, whether it is a teacher, TA or peer, can help the pupil to learn new skills, it is unclear to what extent TAs engage in scaffolding tasks and what this looks like in practice. The findings from the DISS suggest that TAs often gave pupils the answer rather than scaffolding their learning thereby missing opportunities to extend their Zone of Proximal Development.

The WPR does not consider how TAs can be deployed to support the inclusion of pupils, other than in its treatment of academic support. Previous research has demonstrated that supporting inclusion can also problematic. The TAs in the study by Cozens (2014) viewed their role in terms of enabling the child to cope with the demands of mainstream education. This included helping them to control their emotions, helping them to interact socially with their peers, and helping them to generally 'keep up with' the mainstream environment. These findings suggest that the TA is helping the pupil to fit into the mainstream school which seems to be more in line with a definition of the concept of integration rather than inclusion, as discussed in the previous section on the agenda for inclusive education (see section 2.2). The WPR does not include any consideration of inclusion or the inclusive ethos of the school within their consideration of the systemic factors that may impact on effective TA practice. Arguably, this may be because the WPR is focused on the TAs *pedagogical* role and academic outcomes; however, the model does not consider any links to inclusive pedagogy any relationship between social inclusion and academic achievement (Saddler, 2014).

2.5 Chapter Conclusions

In conclusion to this chapter is can be seen that the TA role and research related to it is abundant with contradictions, which can be difficult to reconcile. Firstly, there is the issue of socio-political context. It seems unsurprising that there is a lack of definition in relation to the TA role when the two main education agendas from which the TA role has been developed are equally vague; specifically in relation to the agenda for inclusive education and how this fits with the raising standards agenda. Secondly, the body of research related

to the TA role seems at times contradictory, especially in relation to the WPR model. On one hand the research on which the WPR is based implies a within child focus, which does not consider how pupils outcomes and difficulties may be contributed to by the environment in its treatment of the outcome measures. On the other hand, the WPR appears to be grounded within social learning theory as it considers the environmental and systemic factors that may affect pupils, as well as TAs learning and development.

The WPR provides a useful basis from which to begin to understand TA practice and each component of the model has been considered in relation to the current research base. In relation to TA deployment, I have highlighted how the common deployment method of 1:1 support can have implications for inclusive education and pupils' learning. Current research and models of TA practice advocate for TAs not to be deployed on a 1:1 basis so that they do not present as a barrier between the pupil and the pupil's environment. Recommendations have also been made to support effective TA practice. Firstly, the importance of training has been highlighted, although some research highlights the value of experience over training whilst others demonstrate the difficulties with applying training in practice; the link between training and effective TA practice therefore cannot be assumed. Secondly, collaboration between the TA and class teacher has been consistently identified as a key factor in effective TA practice, the WPR highlights that the practicalities of not having allocated time to meet can create a barrier to collaboration. Other studies go further than this and suggest that the issue of TA low status and marginalisation can also create barriers. The WPR has briefly considered the role TA characteristics in their practice; however, this role seems to have been downplayed in favour of a focus on the systemic factors that contribute to TA practice. Other studies have demonstrated that TA characteristics can be important to TA perceptions of education and relationship building with teachers. This attempt to place responsibility with the school system may inadvertently disempower TAs further and downplay their sense of agency in their own practice.

2.6 Aims and Research Questions

> *If you want to know what is going on, it is always sensible to ask the people who are doing the work themselves.*

(Kelly, 1955, in Reid 2006, p.2).

As George Kelly noted, in order to understand a phenomena it is important to ask the person whom directly experiences that phenomena. This study aims to understand TAs experiences of supporting pupils in a mainstream school, and their experiences of working with other professionals. The research questions for this study are:

1. How do TAs experience supporting pupils in a mainstream primary school?
2. What are TAs' experiences of working with other school staff to support pupils in mainstream schools?

Chapter Three: Methodology

In this study I utilised a qualitative research methods grounded within the theoretical framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009) to gain knowledge and investigate how Teaching Assistants (TAs) support pupils in mainstream education.

In the first section of this chapter I discuss the ontological (the nature of reality) epistemological (the nature of knowledge), and axiological (the nature of values) methodological foundations of this study and I reflect on how they contributed to the choice of IPA as a research methodology. I then move on to discuss IPA theory in more detail and I use this to consider the issue of evaluating quality in IPA and qualitative research. Finally, I outline the selection of methods and procedures I employed to answer the research questions of this study. This chapter draws on previous papers submitted for part completion of my Doctorate in Educational Psychology (Elston-Green, 2015a, 2015b; Elston-Green & Biu, 2014).

3.1 Methodological Foundations

Methodology refers to *"the study, the description, the explanation, and the justification of methods"* (Kaplan, 1964; p. 18). My choice of methodological approach was influenced by my positioning with regard to the philosophical traditions of: the nature of knowledge *(epistemology)*; the nature of reality about which I attempting to gain knowledge *(ontology) (Howell, 2012)*; and the study of values and ethics *(axiology)*. These philosophical foundations have been described by Durant-Law (2006) as the 'Philosophical Trinity' model. I have adapted this model to demonstrate the methodological foundations of the current study, which can be seen in figure 3.1.

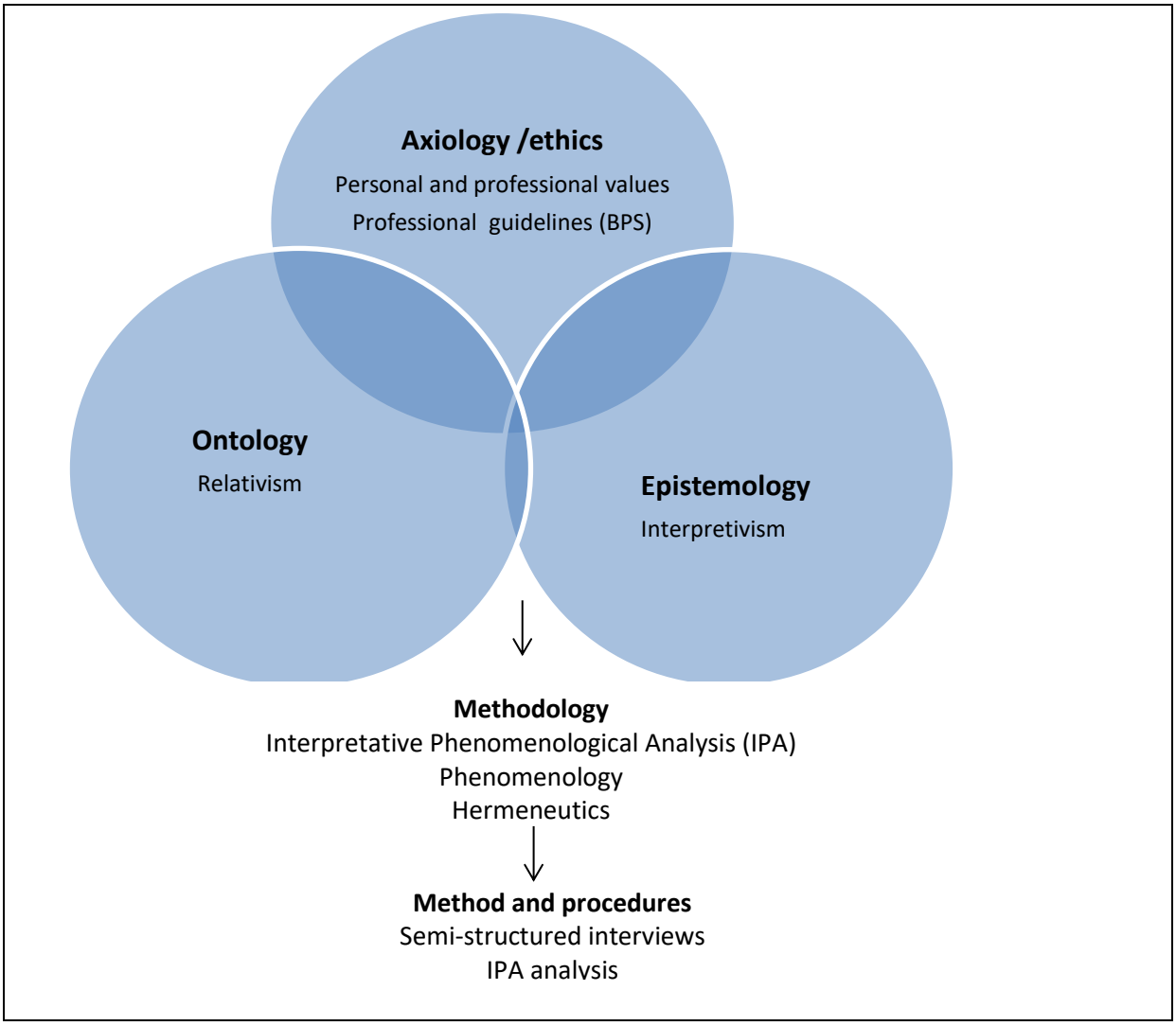

Figure 3.1: Overview of the philosophical foundations of this IPA study

As can be seen in figure 3.1. this model depicts the methodological underpinnings of the current study; I discuss each component in more detail in the following sections. In summary this model demonstrates that the philosophical foundations of the current study includes a relativist ontological positioning, an interpretivist epistemological positioning and my own values and ethical conduct, grounded within the guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2006). These methodological foundations influence the choice of methodology I chose, which was an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This methodology is grounded within phenomenology (the philosophy of experience) and hermeneutics (the philosophy of interpretation). These factors in turn influenced my choice of procedures for data collection and analysis for the current study which included semi-structured interviews and IPA analysis. These philosophical foundations are represented as inter-related and overlapping, where each aspect influences and is influenced by another; for example, axiology (values) plays a role in making value judgements about what types of knowledge (epistemology) are viewed as 'good' or 'bad', and the knowledge gained from any given study will be justified, interpreted, and discussed, within the context of the researcher's cultural and personal values (Carter & Little, 2007). Axiology and epistemology can therefore be regarded as inter-related and overlapping.

3.1.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Understanding how ontology and epistemology influence methodology and the research process is considered a 'vital' matter in conducting research (Coyle, 2007) and it is critical in order to make the research meaningful (Darlaston-Jones, 2007). Ontological positions can be constructed and situated on a spectrum between the positions of *realism* and *relativism* (also known as radical constructionism; Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). Realism assumes that one single reality exists which holds 'true' for the majority and that it is possible to 'objectively' understand and capture this reality. Knowledge of this reality is sought from a *positivist* epistemological positioning, which often utilises quantitative methodologies involving 'objective' measurement, with a goal to eliminate, or at least minimise, researcher bias and values (axiology). On the opposite end of the spectrum, a relativist position assumes that multiple realities exist which are co-constructed through socialisation and language and influenced by personal, historical, and socio-cultural contexts (Gergen, 2001). Knowledge of

this reality is sought from an *interpretivist* epistemological position which acknowledges or embraces the influence of the researcher's own reality and values on knowledge gained through research. This positioning lends itself to qualitative research methodologies.

These distinctions between ontologies and epistemologies have been criticised for being overly simplistic (Coyle, 2007) and writings in the field can be confusing with many overlapping definitions and concepts (Carter & Little, 2007). Methodologies fall anywhere on the realist-relativist continuum; for example, IPA can fit with both a critical realist and relativist position (Ware & Raval, 2007). Secondly, no single ontological or epistemological position can provide criteria to underpin all methods to pursue knowledge. My own beliefs fall towards the relativist, interpretivist end of the spectrum as I believe that multiple realities exist which are consructed in different ways unique to the experiences and values of the individual.

3.1.2 Axiology and Ethics

Axiology refers to the philosophical study of values and includes the study of ethics. The role of axiology in research is viewed differently by the different ontological and epistemological positions; a positivist position attempts to remove values and researcher biases from the research process in the aim of improving 'objectivity', in contrast to an interpretivist approach which posits that as research is always an interpretation, it cannot be free from personal values (Lehman, 2011). An interpretivist position therefore argues that researchers should exercise transparency as this influence could not, and should not be eliminated. I have sought to exercise transparency in this study through reflection of my own thoughts and feelings and at each stage of the research process. This is in line with recommendation for research that axiology should be a consideration throughout the whole research process in terms of the general purpose of the study, methods, reporting, and outcomes (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Ponterotto, 2005).

Axiological positioning influences the importance placed on knowledge compared to other considerations such as human rights and dignity, and relates to the fundamental ethical question in research as to how best balance the rights of participants with the pursuit for

knowledge; known as the *cost/benefit ratio* (Cohen et al., 2007). Fundamentally my values can be summed up by Cavan (1977) who states *"while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better"* (Cavan, 1977, cited in Cohen et al., 2007; p. 56). My ethical conduct in this study was also shaped by the professional guidelines outlined by The British Psychological Society (BPS, 2006), which relate to the core values of *respect, competence*, *responsibilit*y and *integrity*. It was also governed by the university ethics committee, from whom approval was sought before embarking on the research project (see Appendix A). Decisions made regarding ethical conduct are more specifically discussed throughout the 'Method' section of this chapter.

3.2 Methodology: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

3.2.1 Theoretical Foundations

IPA is a research method which attempts to gain an understanding of participants' understanding of their world. IPA is underpinned by an interpretivist epistemological positioning and draws on theory of interpretation (*hermeneutics)* to help the researcher make sense of the participants lived experience (the theory of *phenomenology*). IPA is an *idiographic* approach which focuses on first understanding the particular and unique experience of the individual, rather than the general experience of many (*nomothetic*) (Smith et al., 2009). IPA methodology draws on writings from several philosophers (Gadamer, 2008; Heidegger, 1996; Husserl, 1927; Sartre, 1948; Schleiermacher & Bowie, 1998), and Smith et al. (2009) argue that these positions are complimentary rather than competing, and when understood together can provide a richer appreciation of human experience. In the following section I outline the theory underpinning IPA in the current study. I then go on to reflect on how I addressed the potential limitations of IPA in the current study by drawing on this underpinning theory.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology refers to the theory of lived experience and can be defined as the way in which "things appear to us through experience and consciousness" (Finlay, 2008; p. 1). IPA has been particularly influenced by phenomenological theorists Husserl, Heidegger, and Satre (Smith et al., 2009). Husserl (1927) was concerned with how we come to understand our own

experience. He believed in the notion of 'reductions' where a phenomenon experienced by the individual (for example, professional training) can be viewed and understood and several different ways. He used the metaphor of a prism to represent experience and claimed this experience could be understood by looking at, and carefully reflecting on, the prism through these different angles (for example, emotional reactions, thoughts, perceptions of other's reactions).

Heidegger (1996) took a more existential focus than Husserl (1927). From this existential perspective Heidegger was particularly concerned with understanding experience and *being* in relation to the person's context and with the concept of *inter-subjectivity*. He argued that it is not possible to completely understand experience without considering external factors, as we are all a 'person-in-context', and objects, language, and culture cannot be separated from each other. Heidegger (1996) argued that experience can only be understood through inter-subjectivity, and so experience is therefore always an interpretation; this gave rise to the concept of *interpretative phenomenology*. Like Heidegger (1996) Sartre (1948) was concerned with the concept of inter-subjectivity and interaction with external stimuli; however he believed that through this inter-subjective meaning-making with the world, humans are always *becoming* and developing, rather than already *being* a complete person experiencing external stimuli.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is concerned with the theory of interpretation. IPA accepts that the experiences of individuals cannot directly be known, as experience will always be interpreted by the individual themselves. The individual's interpretation of their experiences can then only be understood by a third party through that third party's own interpretation. This concept of making sense of participants' sense making has been termed the *double hermeneutic* (hermeneutics refers to the theory of interpretation), and is captured in the following quote by Smith et al. (2009):

> *IPA shares the view that human beings are sense-making creatures, and therefore the accounts which participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experiences. IPA also recognises that access to experience is dependent on what*

> *participants tell us about that experience, and that the researcher then needs to interpret that account from the participant in order to understand their experience*
>
> (Smith et al., 2009; p.3).

As discussed in the phenomenology section, the writings of Heidegger gave rise to the concept of an *interpretative phenomenology*, and the idea that experience can only be understood through interpretation. Heidegger (1996) argued that there may be both visible, and concealed and hidden meanings within a text (for example, an interview transcript); how it appears on the surface may not be how it appears when examined further through analytical thinking or what Heidegger (1996) referred to as 'Logos'. The researcher therefore has no choice but to analyse the text from the position of their own experience; their own understanding of this experience 'appears' throughout the process, as at the outset the researcher would not be sure which aspect of their own experience is most relevant. This is a reciprocal relationship between interpretation and the researcher's previous experience. This is in contrast to Husserl (1927) who argued that researchers should 'bracket' their pre-conceptions before approaching the text.

Schleiermacher and Bowie (1998) argued that through this analytic thinking and drawing on their own experiences, the 'interpreter' (or the researcher) can add value to the original text that the speaker could not have insight into. Gadamer (2008) placed his emphasis on the role of history and tradition in interpretation; for example, within the current study, the history of 'inclusion' within education and my understanding of this plays a key role in my interpretation of TA experiences.

Smith et al. (2009) claim that most hermeneutic philosophers are concerned with the concept of the *hermeneutic circle*. The hermeneutic circle can be described as the process of understanding a text by examining both the detail and the bigger picture in relation to each other; to understand the whole of the text it is important to look at the details and the individual parts and to understand any part it is important to go back to the whole (Smith et al., 2009). For an IPA research study the 'part' might refer to a line of an interview transcript and the 'whole' might refer to the whole interview transcript or with regard to Gadamer's (2008) theory the 'whole' could refer to the social and historical context. The participant

might talk about a particular experience in one line, which could be interpreted in one way; however when that same line (or description of experience) is considered in relation to the whole interview text, or in relation to the experiences of other participants in the study, or consideration of the wider research field, and the socio-political context then a new and different interpretation might be made. Likewise an interpretation of one line could add a different meaning to the interpretation of the individual participant's general experience or the experience of other participants in the study.

Idiography

Idiography refers to the specific in depth analysis for each particular individual within a particular context. It argues that understanding emerges from unique perspectives which can then be linked to other people, rather than generalising findings to all people, which is the aim of *nomethic* research. Care should be taken not to introduce a false dichotomy between idiographic and nomothetic research as an idiographic approach can also attempt to make generalisations across participants; however this is through deep understanding of the particular, rather than a more shallow analysis of the masses (Smith et al., 2009). Idiographic research can provide information about the individual, whereas nomothetic research is an amalgamation of experiences, which could therefore be argued to apply to everyone and no one at the same time. An idiographic approach can help the reader to see something new or challenge their own assumptions based on the experiences of another.

3.2.2 Addressing Potential Limitations of an IPA Methodology

IPA has several limitations which I needed to consider in relation to the design of the study. I will now discuss these potential limitations in relation to the current study, in light of the underpinning theoretical foundations outlined above.

Structure and Flexibility

Firstly, IPA has been criticised as overly structured and inflexible (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which suggests that IPA may not be sensitive to the subtleties and disparities of human experience. Smith et al. (2009) themselves note that their guidelines are not definitive, and researchers should be free to make decisions specifically relevant to their own research, informed by the

underpinning theory. They suggest that when the different facets of phenomenological and hermeneutic theory are understood together, this itself provides a basis to understand the richness of human experience from a multi-dimensional perspective.

The Influence of the Socio-political Milieu

A second criticism of IPA is that it omits or minimises the influence of the wider socio-political milieu (Kaptein, 2011; Langdridge, 2007), and it could therefore be argued that IPA is not sensitive to this wider context. However, Langdridge (2007) also notes that IPA's hermeneutic underpinning means that it is more sensitive to the wider context than descriptive phenomenological approaches. This study will draw most heavily on Heidegger's interpretative phenomenology and Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, which both emphasise the role of history and social backdrop in interpretation, by linking findings to previous research findings and psychological theory in the discussion in chapter 5. This influence of the wider context is captured by (Smith, 2011) when he states:

> *Clearly individuals do not live in hermetically sealed bubbles. Their experience takes place in a context and is influenced by the social, historical linguistic milieu into which they are thrown.*
>
> (Smith, 2011, p.3*)*

This locating of individual experience within the wider context will be realised through engagement with the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle has been critiqued for its circularity from a logical reasoning perspective, however it can provide a useful framework from which to approach the interpretation data through moving back between types of data, linking data with previous research and psychological theory, and analysis of data on different levels from the idiographic to across the whole data set. Smith (2011) argues that this link to existing literature is a key responsibility of the researcher, and it is this understanding that increases sensitivity to context, identified as a marker of quality in qualitative research (Yardley, 2000).

Knowledge Bound by Language and Articulation Skills

A third noted limitation of IPA is that any knowledge gleaned from the research will be constrained by the participants' use of language and communication skills (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Heidegger's notion of *logos* posits that there may be both visible and hidden meanings within a text; how it appears on the surface may not be how it appears when examined further through analytical thinking. Satre's concept of *nothingness*, suggests that what is not there is as important as what is, and this has implications for understanding the participants' experience in that what the participant has *not* said becomes just as important as what they have said (Guignon, 2004). Schleiermacher and Bowie (1998) argues that the interpreter can gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena in some ways than the speaker themselves (Smith et al., 2009). For this study this includes a detailed and systematic analysis of what has been said (such as identifying themes), having an overview of the whole data set and linking data to existing psychological theory (Smith et al., 2009).

Inherent Subjectivity

Finally a fourth criticism of IPA is in its inherent subjectivity, related to the position of the researcher (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). As Evertson and Green (1986) point out:

> *Within the heart of qualitative research lies its fundamental beauty and challenge: the researcher-as-instrument*
>
> Evertson and Green (1986)

As the researcher is the main 'tool' in gathering data in qualitative enquiry, their unique position can influence the decisions made through the whole research process, from choosing a topic to study through to analysis of data and considerations of implications (Howitt, 2010). However, as Evertson and Green (1986) allude to, this inherent subjectivity can also have a positive spin. As discussed when considering the axiological foundations of the study, an interpretivist position embraces the influence of the researcher's values on the research process.

A major challenge then is how researchers use their own positioning to interpret participant experiences without misinterpreting them and ensuring validity (Lyons, 2007). As the role of the researcher is so inherent in qualitative research, credibility and rigour should be assured

through demonstrating effort and ability of the researcher (Patton, 2005), and be judged by what the researcher is trying to achieve (Howitt, 2010). Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009, p.91) describe 'an analytic shift' whereby the researcher moves from direct analysis of the transcript to the notes and codes they created from the transcript, and they contend that it is important at this time to keep the hermeneutic circle in mind. In order to increase rigour in this study I grounded myself within the theoretical underpinnings of the methodology, as well as keeping a reflexive diary to consider how my own unique positioning as a researcher impacted on data collection and analysis.

Researcher Reflexivity

'Reflexivity' is important to help researchers be transparent about the limitations of their research (Berger, 2015; Bradbury-Jones, 2007). Authors differ in their interpretations and constructions of reflexivity (D'Cruz, Gillingham, & Melendez, 2007), although there is a general consensus as to the underlying meaning of reflexivity which Berger (2015) describes as:

> *The process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome.*
>
> (Berger, 2015; p.2).

It is unclear whether reflexivity contributes to 'better' research (Pillow, 2003); however, the concept and activity of reflexivity is in-keeping with the theoretical underpinnings of this study, and I was particularly influenced by Heidegger's idea of *appearing* (Heidegger, 1996; Smith et al., 2009); the researcher has no choice but to analyse the text from the position of their own experience and their own understanding of this experience 'appears' *throughout* the process in a reciprocal relationship between interpretation and the researcher's previous experience. This is in contrast to Husserl's idea that researchers should know and 'bracket' their pre-conceptions before approaching the text (Husserl, 1927; Smith et al., 2009). I believe, along with Heidegger, that it would be challenging for the researcher to be sure which aspect of their own experience is most relevant from the outset and instead this develops over time, which is in agreement with Satre's idea of *becoming* (Guignon, 2004). I believe I

am becoming and developing as both a researcher and Educational Psychologist (EP), and through the process of reflexivity I have encouraged my previous experiences and values to 'appear'.

There are few studies on the nature of reflexivity; however, Probst and Berenson (2013) asked researchers how they approach reflexivity in their work and found that they were more concerned with generally having a reflexive attitude than specific skills or techniques. Hollenbeck (2015) notes that few practical recommendations exist as to how to 'do' reflexivity. Hollenbeck (2015) created guidelines to help researchers to gain a better understanding of their researcher position. I considered my own application of these recommendations to the current study in a previous paper on my position as a researcher (Elston-Green, 2015b), which is outlined in figure 3.2.

Hollenbeck's Recommendations	**Application within this research study**
Catch self in evaluations based on deeply held beliefs of what we would expect to see	Throughout the research process I have kept a reflective log to identify and consider my deeply held beliefs of what I would expect to see and I record my thoughts feelings and actions, samples of which can be found when considering my interpretations of each participant's story in chapter four.
Create a passions and fears list to reflect on motivations and drivers for research and expectations of others	Prior to beginning the study I created a list of passions and fears to reflect on motivations and drivers for research. In addition, following the pilot interview, I completed a process suggested by Smith et al. (2009) to improve my interview technique whereby I read a passage of text from the transcript and then created an 'ideal' response. I then compared this response to how I actually responded within the interview and reflected on why they might differ, a sample of which can be found in Appendix F.
Practice embodied awareness and check your emotions in order to recognise and understand emotional responses to the participant and data	I reflected on my own feelings and responses following each interview and recorded them in a researcher diary. I then considered these responses in my interpretations during analysis. Consideration of this is offered in chapter four when discussing individual participant stories.
Plan and practice elements of research to improve research skills	The completion of a pilot interview itself helped me to practise my skills and consider how the previous steps have impacted on my data and this enabled me to make changes when collecting the rest of my data.
Talk to other experts to understand how other people would 'do' research.	I have also had regular supervision and discussions with my cohort of TEPs, and research and practice supervisors.

Figure 3.2: Application of the recommendations for reflexivity (from Hollenbeck, 2015) to the current study

3.2.3 Choosing IPA: The Need for an Idiographic Approach

Smith et al. (2009) argue that the primary reason for selection of an IPA methodology is that it is consistent with the researchers epistemological position; as discussed previously, IPA methodology fits with my interpretivist epistemological positioning. I chose IPA as it was an appropriate methodology to answer the questions I had pertaining to a methodological gap in the research literature, although it should be noted that as IPA is concerned with an idiographic focus of unique experience, it is not required to be informed by, or derive from existing theory and literature (Smith et al. 2009).

During review of the literature, I noticed that most research in the field of TA practice prioritised findings from 'objective' data, gained through structured observations, attainment scores, and surveys, over findings from qualitative data about TAs' perceptions (for example, Blatchford, Bassett, Brown, Koutsoubou, et al., 2009). Where qualitative findings are given primacy, the research attempts to identify themes 'across data' through thematic analysis and does not appear to place value on the individual experience of TAs (for example; Symes & Humphrey, 2011a, 2011b). Although the philosophical positions of these studies included in the literature review were not explicitly identified, this suggests a *nomethic* approach to knowledge was prioritised. An *idiographic* approach, which aims to first gain an in-depth understanding of nuances and idiosyncrasies, could give rise to an alternative insight into the TA role and TA experiences of supporting children within a mainstream context.

The research methodologies of narrative enquiry and IPA both offer an idiographic focus. Both also aim to increase understanding of lived experience and are grounded within a *phenomenological* epistemology, although this is not always clear cut as differences exist within the approaches (Smith et al., 2009). I chose IPA over narrative enquiry due to its focus on an interpretative phenomenological approach; IPA's hermeneutic underpinnings give weight to the researcher's interpretation of participants' experience (i.e. making sense of their sense making). Narrative approaches on the other hand are more focused on the preservation and communication of participants' original narrative, taking a more descriptive phenomenological approach. An interpretivist approach is also consistent with my training as a psychologist which has focused on interpreting both my own and others' experiences. These issues have been discussed further in my paper on my choice of methodology (Elston-Green, 2015a).

3.3 Method and Procedures

In this next section I consider the methods I used to in order to answer the research questions of the study. I begin with an outline of these research questions. I then consider how quality can be judged within IPA research as this informed the decisions I took in the design of the current study. I then go on to outline and reflect on the recruitment of participants, and the methods employed for data collection and analysis.

3.3.1 Research Questions

As discussed in the previous section, IPA methodology can be informed by both the experience of the researcher, and by existing theory and research. This is reflected in two different levels of research question: *first order* questions aim to broadly understand experience, whereas *second order* questions make sense of experience through an existing theoretical lens (Smith & Eatough, 2007; Smith et al., 2009). The first order research question of this study asks:

- How do TAs experience supporting pupils in a mainstream primary school?

The second order research question, informed by research outlined in the literature review is:

- What are TAs' experiences of working with other school staff to support pupils in mainstream schools?

3.3.2 Evaluating Quality in IPA Research

The methodological choices I have made during the design and conduct of this research study have been carefully considered in relation to what constitutes 'quality' in qualitative research. There has been wide debate as to how best ensure quality within qualitative research and Howitt (2010) describes three opposing positions:

- *Extreme relativists* reject the idea that quality can be evaluated at all in qualitative research as *all* views are valid.

- *Antirealists* posit that evaluative criteria for quantitative and qualitative research should be different as they represent distinct paradigms.
- *Subtle realists* accept that subjectivity is inherent within research, and a different perspective on reality will be gleaned by different methods. Subtle realists believe that there is an underlying reality which can be measured, although this is problematic.

My view regarding the evaluation of qualitative research is most aligned with that of the antirealist position, in line with an interpretivist epistemological positioning. As Yardley notes:

> *Reliability and replicability may also be inappropriate criteria, if the purpose of the researcher is to offer just one of many possible interpretations of a phenomenon.*
>
> Yardley (2000)

Several frameworks exist for evaluating quality in qualitative research (Howitt, 2010). Smith et al. (2009) argue that the checklist nature of many of these guidelines can mean that evaluation becomes a 'tick box' exercise and the nuances of qualitative research can be missed. Smith et al. (2009) propose that the criteria developed by (Yardley, 2000) are useful for evaluating IPA research as the criteria are broad enough to allow for a variety of interpretations of 'quality' and transcend philosophical traditions. Yardley (2000) identifies 4 key criteria for evaluating quality in research including: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance. I outline a description of these criteria overleaf, and in chapter six I apply these guidelines developed by Yardley (2000) to provide a self-audit of the current study and evaluate quality.

> *Sensitivity to context* refers to understanding of the theory underpinning the methodological approach, an appreciation of where the study is located in relation to previous literature in the field and the socio-political context (Yardley, 2000).
>
> *Commitment and rigour* 'Rigour' can be defined as '*The quality of being extremely thorough and careful'.* From an interpretative perspective this refers to the commitment of the researcher, as well as the extent to which they have immersed themselves in the data and the complexity and depth of analysis.

Transparency and coherence should be evident in a clear written account of the study in terms of the description of methods, analysis, and personal context, including reflexive observations (Smith et al., 2009). Coherence can refer to how well the chosen methods fit with the underlying theoretical assumptions (Yardley, 2000), and how this theory is used in the analysis of findings; for example, practising within the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009).

Impact and importance according to Yardley (2000) is the ultimate marker for the validity of a study; crucially, a study should reveal something useful, important or interesting for the reader.

3.3.3 Sample and Recruitment

An IPA analysis seeks to understand the experiences of a homogenous group with a shared experience and generally employs a small sample size. Smith (2010; p. 49) propose that participants should *"represent a perspective rather than a population"* and the TAs shared the experience of attending the training as well as supporting a pupil diagnosed with ASD within a mainstream school. Smith and Eatough (2007) note that published articles employing an IPA methodology range from 1- 48 participants, however most are fewer than 20 participants. They argue that for student research projects a sample size of between 3 and 6 participants allows for the depth of analysis which characterises IPA research, whilst still providing enough data to draw themes across the participants.

The sample in the current study included three females and one male, all of whom had completed the NAS EarlyBird Plus program between September and December 2015. All participants worked in a mainstream primary school supporting pupils with a diagnosis of ASD. Three participants worked within a mainstream classroom, they worked on a 1:1 basis with the child at least part of the time and worked alongside one class teacher. One participant worked within a resource base classroom attached to the mainstream school alongside several support staff (who also supported pupils on a 1:1 basis) and a class teacher. As TAs were recruited from a small cohort of trainees on the EBP programme, further

demographic information was not sought in order to protect their identity and provide anonymity. As the EBP trainers were aware that some attendees were taking part in the research, including personal information such as age and the length of time they had been a TA may have made them easily identifiable by others. This potential threat to anonymity presents a limitation of idiographic research and is discussed further in sections 3.3.4 when considering participant rights to privacy and 6.3 when considering the limitations of the current study.

Recruitment

During the recruitment process I was particularly mindful of ethical issues relating to *informed consent*. Informed consent ethics stem from the human rights values of freedom and self-determination (Cohen et al., 2007), and so the participant must be free to take part in the project and decide to do so *for themselves* based on the best available knowledge about the project. The BPS states that gaining consent should be a clear and transparent process which engenders trust between the researcher and the participant (BPS, 2006). I decided to approach the TAs directly following the program, before approaching the senior leadership team at the school in which they work, as I wanted TAs to feel free to decline to take part in the project without possible pressure from senior leadership. I also ensured that TAs were aware of what the project entails through an information sheet (Appendix B). On the consent form (Appendix C) I asked them to place their initials next to each statement to demonstrate they agree with several aspects of the study including the length of the interview and how their data will be stored, in line with the Data Protection Act (HMSO, 1998). Once I had gained TA consent, I then approached the SENCo at the school to inform them that the TA had expressed an interest to take part in the study and ask them for permission to conduct an interview on school premises during school time. SENCos were provided with an information sheet and were also asked to give written consent (see Appendices D and E).

I was aware that my dual role as a TEP and a Researcher might have also presented an ethical tension in that there may have been an expectation by the participant that I would carry out further assessment or intervention with the child with whom they were working. To overcome the challenges a dual role poses it was important that I made my professional background known to participants, and also the capacity and boundaries of my role as a researcher (Richards & Schwartz, 2002). I communicated my professional background and my

research role clear to participants through the information sheets and verbally at the beginning of the study, and I made it clear that I would not be able to follow up on what they had told me in the interview, unless I was concerned for the safety of others within local safeguarding guidelines.

3.3.4 Data Collection

Smith et al. (2010, p.56) suggest that "*IPA is best suited to a data collection approach which will invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experiences*". Along with many IPA studies I therefore chose to collect data through semi-structured interviews, which helped me to flexibly follow up on TAs responses. Each interview was planned to last for approximately one hour, which is considered to be a suitable length of time for an in-depth interview for IPA (Smith et al. 2010). Prior to and during data collection I was particularly aware of the ethical principles of *right to privacy* and *non-maleficence and beneficence* and I will first discuss these before moving on to consider inter-personal skills, research questions and the pilot interview.

Right to Privacy

Diener and Crandall (1978) outline 3 factors inherent in the right to privacy: sensitivity of information disclosed by participants; the type of setting observed; and the dissemination of information. These all apply to participants within this study. The information given by participants was potentially sensitive as it relates to their working life and livelihood, and two of the participants sought reassurance that the information would not be shared. The setting could mean school, which is more public than other settings such as home, or the interview, which pertained to the participants' private thoughts and experiences of the public setting. Although gaining a personalised perspective is a strength of idiographic research, the potential invasion of privacy is a cost which is not as inherent with nomothetic research, especially within quantitative designs where data can be anonymised, even from the researcher (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1969). I protected the participants' right to privacy by keeping their identity private from the EBP Instructors and by ensuring that their comments were anonymised and any identifiable information omitted during the write up.

Non-maleficence and Beneficence

Prior to data collection it was essential I consider the cost-benefit ethical tension between gaining information and the cost to the participant (Cohen et al., 2007). There was a potential for TAs to experience strong emotions whilst talking about their job role and how they experience it, and one TA did appear to seem quite frustrated when talking about aspects of their role, although this was not to the point that I felt the interview should be stopped. Another source of ethical tension included the issue of beneficence and who gains from the study, whereby the gains of the researcher should be balanced with gains for the participants themselves (Cohen et al., 2007). To ensure participants do benefit from the study I will ensure that findings and implications are written up and disseminated to the participants themselves and the schools in which they work. Participants were made aware of this both verbally at the start of the interview, and through the information sheets prior to gaining consent (see Appendix B).

On reflection, I found the ethical concept of *non-maleficence and beneficence* a particular source of tension within this study in relation to my dual role as a researcher and a TEP. The dual role of researcher and practitioner has been identified as a challenge for researchers who also engage in professional practice as it can blur the boundaries about the researcher position (Allmark et al., 2009). In my role as a TEP I try to add value and provide benefit to the people with whom I work by helping them to problem solve and find solutions for their own situation; this is in contrast to the researcher role which is most concerned with extracting information. Although I sought to carry this research out in a way that did not harm the individual (*non-maleficence),* it did not seem that the interview had any immediate benefit for the individual. One way to address this tension might have been to include a question about the steps the participant would take to address any of the problems they discussed, grounded within a *solution focused* approach (De Shazer, 1985, 1988); for example, I could have asked participants *the miracle question* (see figure 3.3), which would ask participants to compare their experience now and how their experience would be if it was exactly how they wanted it to be. This could have helped me to gain information about what participants might have changed about their experience. It may have also helped the participant to consider how they might change their own experience, without it being imposed by me as the researcher. This would have been congruent with my epistemological positioning, my professional and

research ethics, as well as the types of questions that should be asked in an IPA interview to gain a rich phenomenological perspective (Smith et al., 2009).

> *"Suppose tonight, while you slept, a miracle occurred. When you awake tomorrow, what would be some of the things you would notice that would tell you life had suddenly gotten better/ [insert problem here] was gone?"*

Figure 3.3: The miracle question (De Shazer, 1985)

Inter-personal Skills

Good analysis in IPA is dependent on the quality of the interview (Smith et al., 2009) and as Smith and Colleagues (2009) note, the interviewer should endeavour to:

> *Engage deeply with the participant and probe into their world… participants should be given an opportunity to tell their stories, to speak freely and reflectively and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length.*
>
> (Smith et al., 2009; p.57).

My skills as an interviewer and researcher are important to ensuring that the participant feels comfortable, as this would help the interviewee open up to talk about their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Throughout the interview process I was able to draw upon the inter-personal skills I have built on through educational psychology and counselling training. As discussed previously in my paper on my own position as a researcher (Elston-Green, 2015b), my training in inter-personal skills such as reflecting words and phrases back to help the participant/client feel heard, using open questions and good non-verbal communication skills, such as nodding, good eye contact and open body language, all helped me to make the participant feel comfortable. This was expressed by the participant in her feedback that she was surprised at how quickly the time had gone and that she did not usually open up and talk to people that much.

I believe my training in therapeutic skills and reflective practice also aided my reflexivity throughout the research process as I was aware of the importance of reflection to understand

how I influence the interpretations I make. Hsiung (2008) argues that novice researchers may underestimate the role of reflexivity, and it may feel threating to openly and critically consider their own emotional responses. My skills as an interviewer could be argued to contribute to the study's *commitment and rigour* (Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000).

Interview Questions

The interview questions were designed to address the research questions, although research questions were not directly asked in order to gain more in-depth and detailed information. In each interview I gathered the information using questions from the topic guide (see Appendix G), these included broad questions such as "What is your experience of supporting children" and "what has it been like after the EBP?" These questions were meant as a loose guide. Most of the questions I asked followed the lead of the participant. This is where I used IPA type questions suggested by Smith et al. (2009) to follow up on the information given, using phrases such as "can you tell me more", "what was that like for you? ", and "what did you think/feel about that?". This meant that the information I gained from each of the interviews varied depending on the information offered by the participant; for example, the interview with Kadin contained a discussion about inclusion and perceptions about parent choice of education provision, whereas the interview with Sam included a discussion about participant experience of wider school issues and belonging. This diversity between interviews is in accordance with IPA epistemology and demonstrates that meaning was beginning to be co-constructed between myself and the participant (Smith et al., 2009).

Pilot Interview

Competence is a cornerstone of ethical practice and this is important both for the participants, the study, and as a responsibility to the rest of the research community and the university which I represent (Cohen et al., 2007). Conducting a pilot interview helped me to consider a number of factors including: the design of the study; the value and sensitivity of the research questions; my implementation and skill as a researcher; consideration of the analysis and what the information I have gathered might tell me.

Following the pilot interview I engaged in a process recommended by Smith et al. (2009) to reflect on the questions and interview technique (see Appendix F), which takes the following steps:

1) Take samples of the transcript and cover up the interview questions.
2) Read the participants text and consider the ideal follow up question.
3) Compare the ideal to the actual question and reflect on differences

This process helped me to consider the order in which I asked questions and I amended my topic guide accordingly. For example, I opened the pilot interview with a question about the participant's definition of autism and what it means to them in daily life. Smith (2010) recommends that the first question should help the participant to feel comfortable and open up. On reflection, this is a big and abstract question which could potentially have been quite intimidating for the participant. The participant did follow up their answer with the comment "*I hope I answered your question"* (see reflections on interview in Appendix F), which suggests uncertainty and tension. In the subsequent interviews I therefore began with a more concrete, descriptive question where I asked them to tell me about their role.

It also helped me to ask questions in a more phenomenological way throughout the interview, with a focus on experience and meaning making, rather than description and fact. The data gained from the pilot interview was relevant to the research questions and so I decided to incorporate this within the main body of data obtained from the following three interviews.

3.3.5 Data Analysis

IPA is concerned with gaining a detailed account of a participants experience and with making a detailed and in-depth interpretation of that experience. I have discussed how I gathered detailed information for the current study in the preceding sections. In this section I reflect on how I analysed this information to develop in-depth interpretations of participants' accounts of their experiences.

My analysis began during and following the interviews, through careful reflection of the interpretations I began to make at this stage. I kept a researcher diary in which I wrote down my thoughts, feelings, and reactions, which I referred back to in my analysis of the interview data.

I employed the procedure for analysis suggested by Smith et al. (2009), which is outlined in figure 3.5. Although Smith et al. (2009) do not intend this to be a definitive and prescriptive manual, as a researcher using IPA for the first time it did provide me with some useful guidance. My aim in analysis was twofold: first it was to understand individual experience on an idiographic level; and secondly to move towards a general understanding based on the whole data set.

Step 1 Reading and re-reading	I immersed myself in the data through transcription and reading and re-reading transcripts.
Step 2 Initial noting	I completed an initial analysis of data on three levels (description, interpretation, and dialogue).
Step 3 Developing emergent themes	I noted potential themes emerging from the initial noting in step 2 (see example of coding in Appendix H).
Step 4 Searching for connections across emergent Themes	I organised the emergent themes identified at step 4 into groups using a variety of methods outlined by Smith et al. (2009) including: abstraction; subsumption; and polarisation. I created files for each theme to compile all data within that theme.
Step 5 Moving to the next case	I moved to the next case and noted down any reflections and assumptions which 'appeared' during analysis of this case.
Step 6 Looking for patterns across cases	I used inductive analysis to make connections across cases. I created a graphic representation of broader themes (see figure 4.1 in chapter four), and I considered convergence and divergence within and between participants' accounts of their experiences.

Figure 3.4: Analytical procedure for IPA as suggested by Smith et al. (2009)

In step one I immersed myself in the data and participant experience by transcribing the interviews myself; I also listened to the tape recording and read the interview transcript several times.

In step two I began to note my initial thoughts on the interview data. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that to aid a deeper understanding of the different aspects of experience, the researcher should make initial notes on the data relating to the description of what is said, how the participant has used language linguistically, and the meaning and concepts the participant has conveyed. A sample of this initial noting can be found in Appendix H. Thinking about the text from these different perspectives helped me to draw out different understandings. Following this initial analysis for the first participant, I reflected that the

analysis seemed too descriptive, and Smith et al. (2009) note that this is a common criticism of novice IPA researchers. I therefore returned to the transcript to consider a more interpretative understanding of the text. At this stage I found it particularly helpful to make linguistic and semantic comments about the data in order to deepen my understanding.

In step three the aim was to move from working with the initial transcript to working with the comments I made in step two in order to create potential themes. The aim at this stage was to reduce the amount of data and move the research into a more interpretative analysis. I wrote potential emergent themes on the right hand side of the transcript, an example of which can be seen in Appendix H. I found this stage particularly difficult as I was concerned that I might miss something of the participants' experience and I was keen to ensure that my interpretations were tied to the data. Smith (2011) argues that interpretations are valid as long as they are stimulated by the data in some way, and this helped me to let go of the transcript data and move on to search for connections between the themes in the next step.

In step four I moved to searching for connecting themes across the participant data set. I wrote each potential theme on a post it note and I organised them into different groups, using different analytic methods outlined by Smith et al. (2009). The methods I found particularly useful at this stage were those of *abstraction*, where I grouped similar themes together and *subsumption,* where some themes became superordinate themes which organised other sub themes. During this stage I completed a thematic map for each participant which can be seen in Appendices I, J, K and L.

In step five I moved onto the next case and I repeated steps one to four. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that each case should be treated separately from the next; however, I found it difficult to bracket my preconceptions following my analysis of the previous case, as was suggested by Husserl (1927). Instead I took the approach suggested by Heidegger (1996) where I encouraged my pre-conceptions to 'appear' by writing down and reflecting on my initial interpretations in my reflexive diary. This helped me to consider how my interpretations of previous cases might have influenced my interpretation of following cases.

In the sixth step I searched for themes across the whole data set. To do this I wrote the themes for each of the four participants on post it notes and I used the same methods of analysis of

abstraction and *subsumption* outlined in step four. In addition I found the method of *polarisation* useful at this stage, which involved organising opposing themes into one theme to capture divergence between participant accounts. Once I had completed the analysis across themes, I re-visited the participant maps I had created at step four and I reflected on whether the overall themes captured participant experience. This is referred to by Smith et al. (2009) as an *analytical induction*. Analytical induction is fitting with the hermeneutic concept of the *hermeneutic circle* discussed in section 3.2.1; the analysis moves in an iterative process from understanding the particular case (part), to then using this to understand the something of the whole data set (whole), and then using this understanding of the whole to understand something new about the particular case once again. Analytical induction involves proposing an initial statement of understanding (which I created through a graphical representation of a thematic map), which is then compared to each case to consider how the data sits in relation to this wider understanding. The statement of understanding is then modified each time to fit with the data. The thematic map arising from this process is outlined in the next chapter in figure 4.1.

Consistency Between Interpretation and the Data

The role of an IPA researcher is to co-create meaning with the participant (Smith et al., 2009). Although the influence of the researcher is embraced, interpretations should continue to be grounded within the raw data. In this study, this involved checking my interpretations with peers and my research supervisor, which could be regarded as a method of *triangulation*; however, I was not seeking inter-rater reliability, which would be the aim in quantitative research. In utilising an IPA methodology I have not sought to uncover or as reveal the 'pure' experience of a participant (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006), instead I have acknowledged that from a critical realist perspective, as people will all experience 'reality' differently, my experience and interpretations will not necessarily be the same as those of a different researcher. Instead this form of triangulation was used to facilitate reflection and to consider what Husserl described as *reductions* or *prisms* through which to view findings, rather than to rely on my first, immediate response (Russell & Kelly, 2002).

3.3.6 Written Account

I considered two main methods of writing up the analysis and findings for chapter four; to write up the analysis case by case and then consider the themes across participants, or to write up the themes across participants and report individual experience within these themes. I chose to write up the analysis and findings using the latter approach, as this seems to be the method preferred by other IPA research studies (Smith, 2011). On reflection, it seemed difficult for the reader to gain a sense of the participants' whole experience, and the study seemed to lose an essence of IPA. At the beginning of chapter four I therefore chose to add a summary of my interpretation of each participants' experience before going on to consider the overarching themes. I hoped that this would help the reader to gain an insight into the unique experience of each participant that I had been privy to through immersion in participant experiences one at a time. In this summary I also included a summary of my own thoughts and feelings following the participant interviews in order to promote transparency and help the reader to understand what may have influenced my interpretations.

During write up it was important that I protected the identity of participants and that a connection between them and the data is not possible (Cohen et al., 2007). All names used within the study are pseudonyms and identifying information has not been included.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Analysis and Findings

In the following chapter I highlight the key themes which emerged from my examination of TA experiences of supporting pupils within a mainstream setting. I analysed findings using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework, which has been outlined in chapter three.

In the spirit of IPA's underlying philosophy of idiography and phenomenology I begin this chapter by presenting a summary of each participant's unique experience and the themes that arise within each individual account. In line with IPA's hermeneutic philosophy, I follow each summary with a reflection of how my own unique position as a researcher may have influenced data collection and analysis. I then move on to consider my analysis of themes across the whole participant group. Through this analysis I identified three super-ordinate themes: *Being a TA; Applying Learning in Practice*; and *Perceptions and Experiences of Inclusion*, which are outlined in figure 4.1. I take each theme in turn and present my interpretation of participant's accounts of their experience. These themes are inter-related and overlapping, which I discuss further in chapter five.

4.1 Participant Stories and Personal Reflections

4.1.1 Kadin

Kadin works within a resource base attached to the mainstream school. She mostly works with the target child for whom she attended the EB programme, on a 1:1 basis. Kadin supports other pupils when the member of staff assigned as 1:1 support to that child is absent or needs a break. Kadin reported that it is the SENCo who has overall responsibility for the child's learning; although in Kadin's descriptions she does seem to assume considerable responsibility for the child's general care and wellbeing. Kadin reported that she found the EB useful; it changed how she talked to the child and it seemed to help her to respond more flexibly to the child's needs rather than doing what she thought the system expects, although she did not say exactly what she thought that was. Kadin did report that she and staff in the resource base in which she worked had already been using the strategies from the EBP. Kadin seems to feel supported in her role by her immediate colleagues and line manager. Throughout Kadin's account there seems to be a thread of 'us vs them', which is discussed within the theme of separation between herself (and the staff in the resource base) and others who support the children with whom she works (for example, parents, the EBP trainers, and professionals from external agencies). Kadin believes that these 'others' do not appreciate how hard she and her colleagues in the resource base work.

Following the pilot interview with Kadin, I felt anxious at times that as I had never been a TA myself that perhaps I was making judgements about experiences that I did not really understand. This argument (that researchers are not in a position to understand experience if they themselves have not experienced the phenomena) has been put forward within researcher insider/outsider debate to support the view that the researcher should be an insider of the participant group and share common ground with participants (e.g. Fontes, 1998) (Pillow, 2003). Throughout Kadin's interview she often seemed to cast professionals not working directly in the school system in the role of 'others', and talked of others not understanding what she and her colleagues were trying to achieve with the children; on reflection I wondered if perhaps I had adopted Kadin's view that as an 'other' I could not understand her experience, which had increased my feelings of anxiety. In my analysis, I generated alternative understandings of Kadin's experiences of others and how she is viewed

by engaging with the *hermeneutic circle* and considering the meaning of the whole interview in relation to the part I was specifically analysing. In the whole of Kadin's interview there was a general omission of inclusive values when she considered the reasons as to why children were educated in the resource base. I wondered whether this was linked to Kadin not understanding what she and her colleagues were trying to achieve. Perhaps I empathised more with the EB trainers than I did with Kadin at this point. Maybe on this occasion being an 'outsider' did mean that I interpreted Kadin's experience differently to how I might have if I was working within the same system or as a TA. A thematic map of themes identified in Kadin's account can be found in Appendix I.

4.1.2 Jem

Jem worked in a mainstream classroom with the same child for whom she attended the EB. She worked with the child on a 1:1 basis or with a small group of children, which included the target child. Jem and the class teacher swapped to work with different groups of children and Jem seemed to work within the boundaries and instruction provided by the class teacher. Jem perceived that the class teacher assumed overall responsibility for the child. She described a relationship with the class teacher that seemed supportive and collaborative. Jem reported that she had learned a lot from the EBP programme, specifically about how to talk to the child and how to "investigate" what might be underlying the child's behaviour; Jem reported that this learning helped her to increase her confidence and continue in her role as a TA, as she had previously thought of leaving due to her beliefs that she did not have the skills to do the job. The EBP also changed her personal views about children who have autism and additional needs; she seemed to move towards being generally more understanding of their needs.

During the interview, I remember thinking that this collaborative way of working with the class teacher and working with different groups of children was a good way of working. Data from Jem's interview seemed to lack as much depth as data from the other interviews, and I wonder if my positive interpretation during the interview meant that I was less likely to be questioning and inquisitive in my approach. I was also drawn to Jem's account of change and personal growth, and on reflection I realised that with was congruent with my own values regarding the importance of personal and professional development. I think this helped me

to connect with Jem's experience; however, I think I was also initially inclined to view Jem's experience from an empathetic position, than a questioning position. In further analysis I considered Jem's experience from different interpretations; using Heidegger's analogy (Smith et al., 2009), I viewed the prism through different lenses. A thematic map of themes identified in Jem's account can be found in Appendix J.

4.1.3 Ash

Ash worked in a mainstream classroom on a 1:1 basis with the target child for whom she attended the EB programme. Ash reported that other children sitting on the same table received support at the same time. Similar to Jem, Ash also reported that she worked collaboratively with the class teacher to support the child. Ash talked about how, through experience in her role as a TA, she had learnt to support the child. She described learning alongside the child, which gave a sense of collaboration between them. Ash reported that she learnt from the EBP how to explore what might be contributing to the child's behaviour using the 'star' framework taught on the programme (see Appendix M). This seemed to be congruent with Ash's own values of early intervention, and in my interpretation I suggested that this contributed to her apparent commitment to applying the framework in practice and sharing this practice with other members of staff.

Following Ash's interview she told me that she did not usually open up to people as much as she had in the interview. This helped me to feel more confident that I could openly listen to, and understand the experience of others, even If I had not directly experienced the same phenomena myself. As I discussed in the methodology section, I was aware of the "space between" us (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) and how our experiences can be more similar than they first seem when analysed on a deep, idiographic level (Smith et al., 2009). On reflection of the interview with Ash, it seemed that we shared similar values with regard to the importance of early intervention and with regard to emphasis on emotional experience, and it was in this space that I felt connected with Ash's experience. Throughout the interview Jem often talked about her emotional attunement to the child; however, the data I gained about this may have been influenced by my own emphasis on emotional experience in the questions I asked; for example, following the pilot interview with Kadin I reflected that I often asked her questions

about how she felt rather than questions which explored other aspects of experience such as thoughts. Although I became aware of this following the interview, it may have continued to influence my approach in subsequent interviews. Similar to my interview with Jem, I think that these shared values helped me to connect with Ash, and I became aware of the need to generate alternative possible understanding from the more challenging position I had demonstrated in Kadin and Sam's accounts. A thematic map of themes identified in Ash's account can be found in Appendix K.

4.1.4 Sam

Sam worked within a mainstream classroom to support two children who had been moved from the resource base following recommendation to increase inclusive practice by the regulating body OFSTED. These two children are in year 5 and they are not the children for whom Sam attended the EB program. Sam reported that he is responsible for the children's learning, rather than the teacher, and he takes on a pedagogical role, in which he adapts the work to meet the needs of the child. Sam reported that he found some of the EB programme useful, particularly advice about how to talk to the child. He would have liked for the programme to have been more practical and he described the theory about exploring what might contribute to behaviour as "pointless". Sam reported that he feels exploited by leadership, which he attributes to them taking advantage of his aspiration to train as a teacher. There seemed to be a sense of separation and possibly competition between Sam and the class teacher and a sense of separation and marginalisation seemed to echo throughout Sam's account of working within the school system.

In my previous work experience I worked as a Health Care Assistant (HCA) within the NHS. I was a member of the staff group with least qualifications and education within a large government organisation; an experience similar to that of a TA (Blatchford, Russell, et al., 2012). As a HCA I remember feeling exploited and that I believed that I was expected to do much more than was outlined in my job description. I think this experience helped me to empathise and connect with Sam's experience, who from my interpretation also seemed to feel this way. In my researcher diary notes following the interview, I wrote about an interpretation that the school system had exploited Sam and I seemed to view him as a victim in the situation. I reflected that this strong intuitive feeling may have been linked to a

congruency with my own experience and so I was careful to consider alternative lenses and ways of understanding in my analysis, such as the possibility that Sam himself made decisions based on his own desire to gain experience. A thematic map of themes identified in Sam's account can be found in Appendix L.

4.2 Overview of Themes

In figure 4.1 I present the overarching themes identified through the method of analysis outlined in chapter three. In the remainder of this chapter I consider how these themes relate across participant accounts. I discuss these themes further in chapter five in relation to the relevant research literature and theory previously outlined in chapter two.

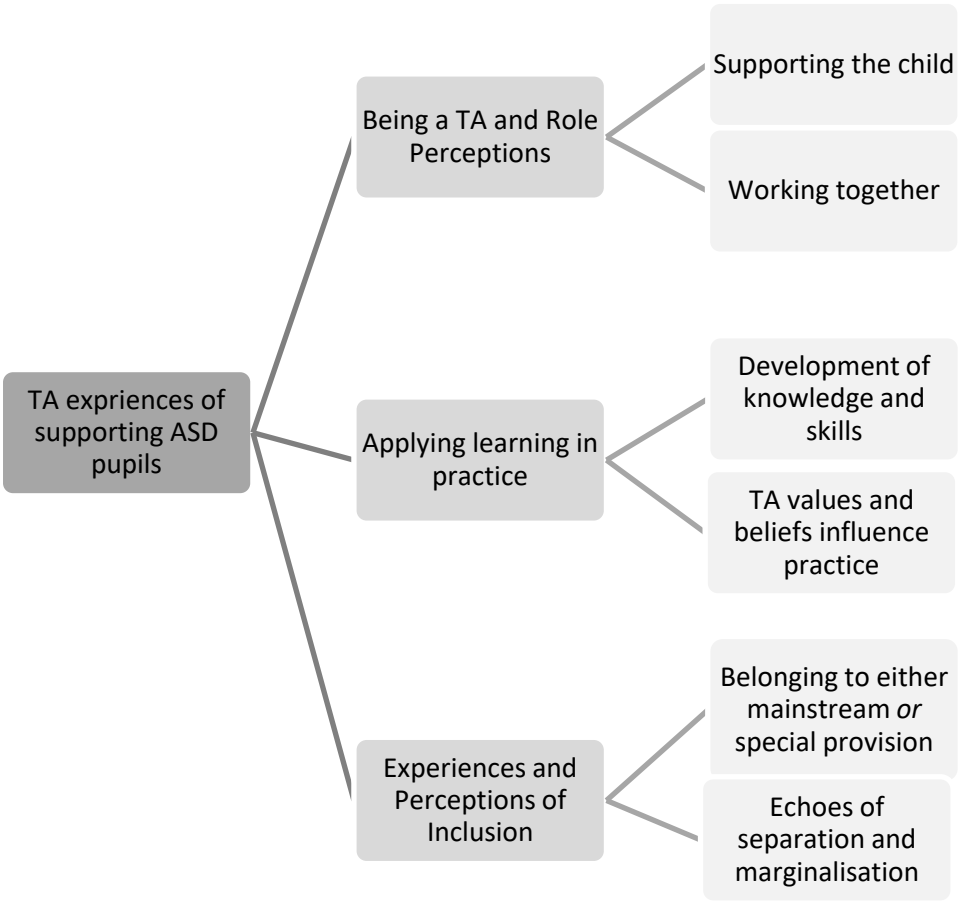

Figure 4.1: Overview of themes for the current study

4.2.1 Theme 1: Being a TA and Role Perceptions

A dominant theme to emerge from the analysis was the superordinate theme of being a TA and what this meant to each participant, specifically in relation to their responsibilities and how they worked together with the class teacher. Considerable divergence existed with regard to the level of responsibility participants believed they assumed in their role; convergence and divergence in participant accounts can be seen in figure 4.2.

	Kadin	Jem	Ash	Sam
Supporting the child				
Promoting skills for independence	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supporting emotional regulation	✓	✓	✓	
Supporting learning			✓	✓
Working together				
Balance of responsibility	✓	✓	✓	✓
A feeling of exploitation				✓
Collaboration	✓	✓	✓	
Separation	✓			✓
Teachers understanding of ASD			✓	✓

Figure 4.2: Participant convergence and divergence within Theme 1: Being a TA

Supporting the Child

All participants talked about how they supported pupils in their role and the level of responsibility they believed they assumed for the child. Considerable divergence existed between participant accounts; Kadin, Jem and Ash broadly talked about supporting the child's social and emotional development, and they perceived the class teacher assumed overall responsibility for the child. Sam on the other hand talked mainly about his pedagogical role and seemed to assume responsibility for the child's learning. Divergence between Sam and the other participants was also apparent in his perceptions of his level of responsibility in the role.

Promoting skills for independence

Kadin, Jem and Ash talked about helping the child to cope with, or fit into, the mainstream environment through helping them to follow rules and routines, helping them to prepare for change, and promoting independence.

> *Kadin: Obviously you are encouraging independence- them to take their coats, their bags off, take the book planners out, the PECs [Picture Exchange System] are ready, it's just the daily care of the child.*

> *Jem: She refused to come inside the classroom… she ran away in the school hiding under the staircase…we left her down for quiet time for five/ten minutes and gave her an option… she can have extra time at home or we can do extra golden time at school…we make her come back to the class after an hour but we did it.*

> *Ash: So that's mainly part of my role- I make sure she puts her hands up and she has to talk when she has to talk, because she likes talking in between, so my role is to make sure she does the right thing in the classroom.*

Most participants talked about promoting the child's independence, specifically about providing mediation for self–care and learning tasks. Sam talked about the increased independence expected of the child now that they were attending the mainstream section of the school.

> *Sam: Now we're in here [the mainstream] we're mean to act like year 5's- 10 year old children.*

This seemed to link to differing expectations of children depending on whether the child was in the mainstream and resource base provision and this is discussed further when considering narratives about provision in theme three.

Supporting emotional regulation

Jem and Ash also spoke about their role in regulating the child's emotional state and behaviour.

> *Jem: Ok I came to school…and she [the child] was not in a good mood… and the teacher said to me… "Can you keep an eye on her"… so she left things to me to calm her down, bring her back to the lesson.*

> *Ash: You can feel that tension coming on in him [if] anybody says "He's not ok" you know it already because that's the child you work with… I naturally give him a rock from side to side and sing quietly to him that he won't disturb the children, you can actually feel his body relax then…you can actually feel him just sit and naturally letting go.*

Kadin, Jem and Ash all talked about how they aim to understand what might be underlying the child's behaviour, and they all talked about how they used strategies from the EBP such as the 'Star' and the 'Iceberg' frameworks (see Appendices M and N) to aid their understanding. This is discussed further in theme 2 (applying learning in practice) when considering the subtheme of 'the development of knowledge and skills' in relation to understanding behaviour.

Supporting learning

Whilst Kadin, Jem and Ash focus on supporting the social and emotional needs of children, Sam emphasises his pedagogical role throughout the interview. In the following quote Sam talks about taking responsibility for balancing the learning needs of the two children he supports.

> *Sam: It was me [emphasised] who did their maths work and do the planning for them to teach them what they know…I have to plan her reception work but keep the other child focused and up to date with what is happening in the year 5 class.*

His emphasis on "*me*" in this quote highlights the huge sense of responsibility he seemed to feel for the children's learning. Sam also identified that the move from the resource base to the mainstream part of the school required a shift in his own approach. He described moving towards a more serious role and way of being.

> *Sam: It was just a case of I didn't act too babyish for how I used to act in the unit yeah I just become pretty strict with them and they dealt with it pretty well so I think I turned from being a nice fun person who in the centre they needed, then to bring them out to try to sort them out to get them to level where they can do exams.*

My interpretation of this quote identifies the link between this change in focus on a more serious and pedagogical role and a change in focus on academic attainment within Sam's description of his experience. Ash also talked about the pedagogical aspect of her role and she believes that it is part of her role to push the child academically and provide mediation for academic work.

> *Ash: I repeat it to her…and get her to read it back to me and then she will say "oh now I understand!" …she would give me a sentence and I would say can you put in a 'wow' word (which is like an adjective).*

Although Ash noted her role in supporting the child's learning, this was in the broader context of supporting other aspects of the child's development including their emotional wellbeing; only Sam focused mainly on taking responsibility for teaching and learning in the current study.

Working Together

Balance of responsibility between the TA and the Teacher

Kadin, Jem and Ash's accounts suggest that it is the class teachers who are responsible for the planning of work and the pupils in the class.

Jem: Teachers know what they're doing and they do the right amount of planning, they know what they [the child] can do… she can progress, so teachers know everything.

Ash: When I get into the classroom teacher will say "Miss this is what we are gonna do" and she will show me the paper…if there is something that we haven't learned before the teacher will say well "Miss we gonna do something different today and this is how we do it"…if she [the child] doesn't understand it I ask the teacher can I take her out after the teacher finish.

Jem and Ash seemed to be guided by the class teacher in their practice. These two TAs both report that they had a low sense of self confidence prior to the EBP and it is possible that this low confidence means that the balance of power appears to be weighted towards the teacher; as Jem notes "*Teacher's know everything".* Kadin also states that it is the class teacher who has overall responsibility for the child; however, she does seem to carry a huge sense of responsibility for the everyday wellbeing of the child in the following quote when talking about what she is responsible for.

Kadin: The well and care and the being of the child- everything. I feel it's just not I got a specific role and that is it. I feel the minute I walk in the school, you know, I'm there for the school and I'm there for that child and it doesn't matter what that child's needs, it can be anything.

Within Jem and Ash's accounts the teacher also seems to be responsible for communication with parents.

Jem: I have no communication direct with the parents, the teacher has the communication with the parents.

Ash: Mainly [parents speak] with the teacher …the girl I'm working with now, if she does anything wrong I will naturally talk to Daddy or Mummy…so if I'm going to talk to them I speak to the teacher and say "Can I talk to mum about what she did today?"

and she say "yes, you go ahead and talk to them"…you've got to think about what you gonna say, how you gonna say it without getting yourself into trouble', because you've got to say it without hurting the parents.

Kadin, Jem, and Ash's accounts suggest that their practice is guided and contained by the class teacher, and Kadin and Jem seemed to value their ability to adapt and be flexible within the boundaries set by the class teacher. Kadin points out that working in the mainstream seems to allow for more TA flexibility. Ash notes that being able to contribute and add to the child's learning in a flexible way, and the recognition of this by the class teacher, adds to her own sense of satisfaction.

Kadin: What I also like about working in mainstream… you look at the child that you're working with you can differentiate the work to the child's way of learning which you have that freedom to do so if it's not, if you're not learning this way you can use your own initiative and do it in another aspect.. you can do it [in the resource base] as well, whatever works for the child as long as the learning for the goal is for them to achieve the learning objective.

Ash: If I said to the teacher "I should have done this, can I do it this week?" you need somebody who can say "Yes you can". As long as you are sticking to the topic and it can be done for this child to understand… if you have a teacher in the classroom who will say "As long as it is the same topic and you can add something so she will enjoy it"…it makes yourself feel happy in what you've just done. The teacher herself recognises it and likes it so-

In contrast to the accounts of Kadin, Jem, and Ash, Sam perceives that he assumes total responsibility for the child and that the class teacher has little input.

Interviewer: What role does the mainstream teacher play?
Sam: Um… not much I would say if I was to put it in a summary, I'm teaching two children on a TA role, where I'm doing a teacher's job but classed as a TA to these two children. So I do, I do reception maths I get given the planning but I do my own stuff

with one of the children and with the other I'm switching from reception mind set to year 5 mind set to reception mind set to year 5 just going back and forth trying to do two different levels so they can get full benefit out of the lesson…which, well my opinion it's a bit of a windup because I've got to do two things at once… she just she tells me what we're going to be doing in that lesson and it's really me teaching the higher level to one of them and then keeping the lower level and making sure they are both focused on what they are doing instead of the mind just wondering off….the teacher I feel plays the role of not much.

Within this quote lies a seeming contradiction; Sam said that they are given planning by the teacher but he then does his "*own stuff*". It is unclear from the transcript what is meant by this. Sam could be saying that the teacher gives planning and they are then expected by others to make adaptations. It is also possible that Sam's own personal goal to be a class teacher has influenced the way in which he approaches the TA role.

Sam: I would have liked to have gone up [to the next year group] with one of them…since we got taken out [of the resource base] he does sit his maths now - that was <u>me</u> [said with emphasis] It was no body else…I wanted to do that…then after that I'd have liked to have gone into mainstream and done my primary school teaching so it would have been a –nice little ending.

Sam's aspiration to train as a teacher may have meant that he was more motivated to take on a higher level of responsibility for the child's learning than was expected of him, compared to a TA who did not hold such aspirations. This could explain, at least in part, the divergence between Sam's and the other participants' accounts and with regard to the level of focus on the pedagogical aspect of the TA role.

This quote also suggests that Sam feels frustrated that he is required to do the planning, or possibly that he is frustrated as he feels he receives little recognition for the lack of planning. From Sam's interview it is my interpretation that Sam feels that this responsibility has been unfairly put upon him and it is something he has "*got*" to do, and this links with Sam's feelings of being exploited.

A feeling of exploitation

Sam seems to think that he is being unfairly treated, which has led to some feelings of frustration.

> *Sam: I'm still getting paid the TA wage for doing a teachers [job]… Before I just thought I was a TA, whereas now I'm like a bit of a – a bit of a newcomer who needs to make people happy to get what I want, which is to be a teacher… that was mentioned in my interview…so I feel like it's more of a - lets bleed [him] as much as we can, he'll stick with us because we've given him the chance… my opinion is it's just a bit of a wind up.*

Sam believes that other school staff think "*let's bleed [him] as much as we can".* This seems to come from the phrase *"to bleed someone dry",* which means to use up someone's available resource, which is based on the metaphor of a person losing so much, blood that they die. This phrase evokes a strong sense of being worked beyond capacity and suggests that Sam feels he is being exploited by others because of his desire to gain experience to be a teacher.

Collaborative working

There seems to be a general sense of collaboration in working with the class teacher and the child within Jem and Ash's accounts. Jem and Kadin describe a collaborative web of communication and consistency between themselves, the class teacher, the parents and the child in order to provide support for the children.

> *Jem: It's the communication between me, teacher, and the parents… I have no communication direct with the parents, the teacher has the communication with the parents… Communication to each other [is really important] to do things better and we can solve the meltdown… we've not left it too late.*

> *Ash: Once you work with the parents, the teachers and the child, it's easier for you to communicate and to get to understand that child… just work together and try to do the same thing.*

Jem and Ash talked about regular communication with the class teacher, which seemed to be about sharing information to provide targeted and consistent support. They also seemed to feel that they were able to make a contribution to planning and problem solving with the class

teacher. This suggests team working and a sense of collaboration between the TA and the teacher. Ash notes how this collaboration is important to her own wellbeing and feelings of confidence in delivering pedagogic material.

> *Jem: We discuss before what we want the outcomes [to be] so we plan differently, we think… "How are we going to work this way?". It helps before the lesson if we talk to each other -what she [the child] can do it and where she has to do it and what is the main focus of things… yeah so the communication with me and teachers are important.*

> *Ash: Every morning when I get into the classroom the teacher will say "Miss this is what we are gonna do", and she will show me the paper… and if I don't understand something I say "Miss I don't know how to do this… since I never done it like this before", and she will explain it to me and say "Anyhow don't worry about it because we going to do it on the board all together".*
> *Interviewer: Ok and what's that like for you once you know that?*
> *Ash: I feel happy! Yes I feel happy! Yes, I can do it!! (laughs)… we have good communication between us to make sure that if it doesn't work we can do something else to cover the whole subject with [the child]… just work together and try to do the same thing.*

<u>*A sense of separation*</u>

There seemed to be a sense of separation in Kadin and Sam's relationship with the class teacher and/or SENCo. Although Kadin felt supported by the class teacher and that they were able to contribute ideas during a weekly team meeting, it seems that it is the class teacher who does the planning for the child.

> *Kadin: We don't get any planning time at all. We go by what the teacher plans…the team's so big. I mean we can contribute ideas and they are taken on board but we don't get involved with the planning… we don't get time…it's the teacher that actually does the planning.*

Sam talks about separation from the class teacher and doing his own thing, which was discussed in relation to perceptions of responsibility in the superordinate theme "Being a TA". There seems to be a sense of competition between Sam and the class teacher regarding who takes responsibility for the child's academic attainment, which adds to the sense of separation between him and the class teacher. In the following quote Sam states that the class teacher has taken the credit for academic outcomes for the teaching input Sam believes he has given. This also highlights again the huge sense of responsibility Sam seems to feel for the child's learning.

> *Sam: The boy's parents they're ridiculously happy with me, they say he's writing whereas he didn't bother before he takes pride in what he does he talks about what he has done at school….they're happy with what I, well, what I have done with them…I don't think he would have ever done an exam whereas now he's on route to do a SAT himself …because I feel like it's more of the way I've dealt with him whereas before he never would have done it… the teacher's done nothing…but other people get the credit for it because obviously it comes down to levels and how much you can bring a child up these days.*

This competition suggests a sense of separation between Sam and the class teacher, rather than working as a team to support the child. This last comment gives an indication as to why Sam believes this might occur; "*it comes down to levels and how much you can bring a child up"* which I interpreted to mean that Sam believes teachers take the credit for academic progress as there is a focus on academic achievement and progress within the school. Sam also seems to have a high level of confidence in his skills and seems to think he has done a better job than the class teacher, which might contribute to a sense of completion and a balance of power in the classroom biased towards Sam.

Teachers understanding of ASD

Sam believed that the teacher did not understand the needs of the TA or of the children with ASD.

Sam: They [the teachers] don't understand how to help the TA to deal with it [SEN]

This is in contrast to the accounts of Jem and Kadin which suggested that they believed the teacher understood the needs of the child and this helped give them more flexibility to adapt in their role and helped them to feel more supported. Ash talks about how her enjoyment of her job has increased because the teacher understands her role and the needs of the child; this suggests that teacher understanding of ASD needs is important to her.

> *Interviewer: so you said you've been very lucky can you tell me about that and why you think you've been lucky?*
> *Ash: Because the teacher understands! She understood what was going on between me and him [the child], and if he gets in one of his tantrums and throws himself on the floor the teacher looks at me and I look at her and I just naturally sit down there with him.*

4.2.2 Theme 2: Applying Learning in Practice

All participants talked about their experiences of the EBP program, what they believed they had learnt from the programme, and what this looked like for them in practice. Figure 4.3 highlights the convergence and divergence within participants' accounts relating to this theme. All the participants identified that their interactions with the child had changed following attendance at the programme. They all also believed that it was important to understand and learn about what may be contributing to the child's behaviour, although there was marked divergence in participant accounts relating to the way in which this understanding could be reached; Jem and Ash talked about the usefulness of the frameworks outlined on the EB programme, whereas Sam expressed the belief that this "theory is pointless". Although Kadin talked about understanding the reasons for behaviour, she did not talk specifically about the methods to achieve this. Ash and Sam both talked about how their own upbringing influenced practice and my interpretation suggests that these underpinning values have influenced Sam and Ash's practice.

	Kadin	Jem	Ash	Sam
Development of knowledge and skills	✓	✓	✓	✓
Changed perceptions of autism	✓	✓	✓	✓
Changed interactions with the child	✓	✓	✓	✓
Increased confidence		✓	✓	
Values and beliefs influence practice			✓	✓
Frameworks are important		✓	✓	
"Theory is pointless"				✓
Values from TAs' family system			✓	✓

Figure 4.3: Participant convergence and divergence within Theme 2: Applying Learning in Practice

Development of Knowledge and Skills

All the participants talked about how they had learnt skills and knowledge for their role and this was through attendance at the EBP programme, through their own experience, and from the experience of other school professionals. They all believed they had applied learning from

the EB programme in practice in some way, although the programme seemed to have the least impact for Sam.

Changed perceptions of autism

All the participants talked about their increased understanding of autism. Here Kadin talks about how the EBP helped her to increase empathetic understanding of the child's emotional world.

> *Kadin: Um well I never thought they were naughty I mean, I'm , I'm quite stern and I like, I like things done in a certain way and it's made me realise that actually they can't cope with a certain situation and it's made me understand that actually their emotions, their feelings and their way of them looking on you know, how they're looking at life and their struggles, does that make sense?...where I'm quite stern du du du du du, I have to think well hang on a minute, just look in a bit more deeper what are they actually feeling, their affairs and actually understand their affairs… I think it's helped me a lot [to remember] that it's a person.*

Jem seemed to become more accepting and less judgemental about difference and diversity.

> *Jem: I'm so happy I went to the course…I can understand these people [people with a diagnosis of ASD] and their parents and it's really make me different person…now I can understand…before I would think he's silly, [and question] why is his mum not stopping him?*

Changed interactions with the child

All TAs spoke about how learning from the EB had changed their interactions with the child in some way, which seemed to be linked to increased understanding about the child's communication needs.

Kadin talks here about how the EB was a useful reminder to simplify the language she uses with children.

Interviewer: Is there anything from the program that you found useful to take in to school and use?

Kadin: Obviously with my communication and my language talking to the child…because you do forget that sometimes if you talk too much, it has to be simple, it has to be easy instructions, and I've been doing this for years and so easily you can forget.

Sam reflects here on his communication in practice and how the child interpreted this in an unintended way by making a literal interpretation. Sam told me that after this interaction he remembered something he had learnt on the EB programme and considered this in relation to his own practice. This suggests that Sam was able to reflect on learning from the EB to evaluate his own practice and possibly to consider future practice.

Sam: I said [to the child] "Let's go back we'll have some fun, and then it's lunch time". So we went back, and me and the child were talking about Minecraft…he classed that as 'the fun', and then he thought after we stopped that it was lunchtime so he went and got his lunchbox and started walking to the hall when in fairness it wasn't lunch for 45 minutes later and I was just like "Why did you say that?"… I remembered from being at the EarlyBird course a sense of how to talk and being direct, as in actually being straightforward and truthful about what's happening.

For Jem, learning about communication on the EB programme seemed to contribute the increase in her confidence regarding her ability to interact with children with a diagnosis of ASD.

Jem: We have to mention their name first, and then slowly, in less words, we have to give our instruction, there's so much other information I got from the EarlyBird program that helped me to understand these children and handle her more confidently.

Jem and Kadin both spoke about responding more flexibly to the child after the EBP, which seemed to be linked to a greater understanding of the child's needs.

> *Jem: Some children in my school don't give you eye contact, he's listening he just doesn't want to give you eye contact, but he's still listening playing with his blue tac- he always needs his blue tac. I didn't understand before I just took that blue tac, turned him around, "look at me"- like bossy behaviour like. But now…yeah he's fine, he's listening, he following my instruction, just leave him what he wants to do.*

Jem identified that she engaged in "bossy behaviour" prior to the program, which suggests that she wanted the child to do as she wanted; however, following the program Jem's increased understanding of the reasons for lack of eye contact in children with a diagnosis of ASD seemed to change her expectations regarding social behaviour, and Jem seemed to respond more flexibly to the child, rather than trying to coerce them into behaving in the way she thought they should.

Kadin talked about how the EB helped them to think about how to "*choose your battles".*

> *Kadin: It's like they [the EB trainers] said, choose your battles. If you're not having a good day, is it really worth hitting yourself against a brick wall. You know sometimes you just have to think, "right well, it's not working for that child, it's not working for me.*

The EBP seemed to help Kadin to "choose" what "battles" to engage with which suggests that it helped her to let go of some control, and take a step back to reflect and try something different in order to respond more flexibly to the child's needs.

Increased confidence

Jem and Ash both talked about their increased confidence in the TA role following their attendance at the EBP. Jem told me that before attending the program she did not feel confident in her ability to support pupils with a diagnosis of ASD; however, following the EB programme, Jem felt confident that she could overcome the challenges of supporting the

pupil with whom she was placed; Jem also suggests that she feels confident in her ability to generalise this learning to working with other pupils.

> *Jem: last year…they told me there's a girl coming and she needs help…I hadn't done any course before so I was a bit scared…I'm not that confident. I'm not sure what I'm gonna do, how I'm gonna handle- because she has assaulted people, she is quite violent as well sometimes.*

> *Jem: So they told me I'm gonna go on EarlyBird program… as I went through the program I am very confident now and I can handle her easily… I can work with any child now.*

When I asked Jem if she thought anyone else had noticed this increase in confidence Jem told me that her class teacher had noticed and that this changed the way in which they supported the child. The child also seemed to have noticed a change as Jem noted that the child was more open to working with her following the EBP.

> *Jem: My class teacher –she's really happy…to start with the child never said hello to me, she never wanted to work with me, she always refused. After [the] course, and it's taken time, slowly slowly slowly slowly we can do it. [The] teacher has confidence… she can leave that child with me now, before she needed someone to help who used to work with her, now she can leave her with me…it's really a successful achievement for me.*

Ash told me that she had also questioned her ability to do the TA role when she had first moved to work in a mainstream setting from the resource base, prior to attending the EB programme.

> *Ash: at first it was like "Can I do it?" [whispered]. From the Resource base into the mainstream it's like "Oh my gosh! What am I gonna do there?!"*

This lack of confidence seemed to be specifically related to a lack of confidence in academic work. I wonder if this therefore reveals an increased academic expectation when moving to the mainstream part of the school. Ash also told me this in a whisper. It seemed like a secret or that Ash did not want others to find out these feelings of incompetency. I wonder if this sense of secrecy is linked to a sense of shame and whether this can be attributed to the participant's own expectations or the expectations of the school system that she should know what to do. Ash then went on to say that she realised that she could do the mainstream TA role through experience and teacher's support.

> *Interviewer: So what helped you think "yes I can do that?"*
> *Ash: It was just by sitting down there looking at the work the children had and how the teacher's explaining it - she explain it you know because everybody can understand.*

This suggests an increase in confidence, although this seemed more related to Ash's experience in the classroom and observation of the class teacher rather than directly attributed to learning on the EB.

Values and Beliefs Influence Practice

Considerable divergence exists within Jem, Ash and Sam's accounts about how central they believed theory and frameworks to be in aiding understanding about what might be contributing to behaviour. On the one hand Jem and Ash believe the frameworks taught on the EB have been useful in practice, on the other hand Sam strongly felt that such theory is not useful.

Frameworks are useful

Jem and Ash both valued learning about the 'Star' and 'Iceberg' frameworks in the EB program (see Appendices M and N) which aim to understand underlying reasons for behaviour. They both talk about how they have applied these in their practice. Ash talks here about using the Star framework to understand a change in the child's behaviour and then using this to facilitate discussion with the class teacher about further intervention.

Ash: Right now, um at this present moment, I'm trying to do one of the stars because, the trouble is just lately she's started showing me different things in her uhh different behaviour… and, thinking about the stars… see if I can pick up something, and then have a chat to the teacher and see if I can work on something.

Jem talks about using the strategies learnt on the EB program to understand underlying reasons for behaviour and how to "*be like a detective"*.

Jem: Yeah so we have to think about the 'star' thing- what, when, where…why is this not working, what is missing…we have to investigate, we have to be like a detective.

It seems from these quotes that both participants believed that the frameworks were useful to their role and the child; for Ash they helped her to identify triggers, and these seemed to link to her values about the importance of early intervention, which is discussed further later in this section, in consideration of the TAs' own values derived from their family system. For Jem it seemed important to "be like a detective" and she seemed to view her role as investigating what might be underlying the child's behaviour in order to change the child's environment.

"Theory is pointless"

Sam on the other hand does not believe that the frameworks learnt in the EB are useful to his practice.

Sam: Normally now if they're having a bit of a meltdown it's if they don't understand something, it's just between a few separate things once you get to know the child- instead of getting to know the child and trying to draw the iceberg and stuff it's just pointless…I'm not going to sit at home with a triangle [diagram] with all the problems because even now sometimes when they're upset you- I have no idea why they're having a paddy in the morning.

This quote suggests that Sam has little belief that any efforts to apply the theory would be effective. This could suggest a low sense of self-efficacy for applying theory (a belief in his

own ability to complete tasks effectively; Bandura, 1994). Sam's disbelief that the theory from the EBP could be helpful could be understood in terms of Sam's apparent preference for more practical, experiential learning. Perhaps he also does not understand the practical applications theory can have.

> *Sam: I just thought the theory side of it was just pointless. if it's more talking about experiences and how they dealt with it, which some of it was- if the whole thing was like that then yeah I could I'd have found it [the EB] twice as better…maybe, if they'd thrown in some- being at the special school… shadowing in that sense…I thought more of a hands on slash practical than the theory side of it. There's nothing wrong with the theory, well, there's nothing wrong with theory but I thought that it's more of a job I feel you need to be at the front rather than sitting behind a desk.*

Sam is also the only participant who did not work with the child for whom he attended the EBP. It could be that Sam found it difficult to generalise and apply the theory to a different child in practice.

Values from the TAs' own family systems

Ash and Sam both made explicit links about how their own upbringing influences their practice. As they talked about their upbringing I noticed that they seemed to make judgements about what they believed to be right and wrong, which I interpreted as some indication of their value and belief systems. It seemed to me that these values and beliefs influenced how Ash and Sam applied learning from the EB programme in practice.

Sam talks about his views that the children should "like it or lump it", which is influenced by his own upbringing as a child; this phrase suggests to me a need to accept the situation for what it is as it cannot be changed.

> *Sam: just the way I was brought up myself I think it's the case – yeah, like it or lump it, it's exactly what I have done with the children I've been brought out with, if they don't like it, they don't do the work they take the consequences.*

This view of needing to accept things as they are seems congruent with Sam's views that "theory is pointless". This suggests a need to accept that some things cannot be understood, and perhaps Sam feels he has to like it or lump it rather than do something about it. This could help to explain why the EBP appeared to have little impact for Sam.

Ash's accounts of her upbringing and apparent values also seem congruent with her practice. Ash talks about how her mum always talked to her about not letting "*anything get too big*".

> *Ash: You know my mum always said to me, don't let anything get too big that you can't handle, always keep it to something you can handle. So I say, and even for my children, never let anything get big.*

This suggests that value is placed on understanding problems and intervening early, which seems congruent with Ash's previously identified desire to understand a change in the child's behaviour using the 'Star' framework. I wonder whether an emphasis on the importance of early intervention influenced Ash's engagement with the frameworks, which aim to identify underlying causes of behaviour, as well as contributing to her efforts to collaborate and problem solve with the class teacher.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Experiences and Perceptions of Inclusion

This theme of TA experiences and perceptions of inclusion relates to two participants in the study; Kadin and Sam. Kadin and Sam talked about differences between the mainstream and resource base provision and there seemed to be a sense of separation between the two. This sense of separation and marginalisation was also apparent in Kadin and Sam's experiences of belonging in the wider school system. Ash and Jem did not talk about their perceptions of provision or their sense of inclusion/exclusion in the school system.

	Kadin	Jem	Ash	Sam
Belonging to either mainstream *or* special provision	✓			✓
Echoes of separation and marginalisation	✓			✓

Figure 4.4: Participant convergence and divergence within Theme 3: Experiences and Perceptions of Inclusion

Belonging to Either Mainstream or Special Provision

Within Sam and Kadin's descriptions of provision there seems to be a definite sense of belonging to *either* mainstream *or* a special school. In the following quote Kadin talks about how children in the resource base attached to the mainstream school have needs that cannot be met in the base. Kadin suggests that these children should therefore be educated within a special school.

> *Kadin: It's a mainstream school, so you really want the children that are able to interact [and] integrate into mainstream classrooms…*
>
> *Interviewer: Where would the right place be for them?*
>
> *Kadin: The special school.*

Kadin seems to make sense of her belief that children are being educated in the wrong provision by suggesting that parents are in denial about their child's needs, and parents and

professionals do not understand the child's needs and therefore are not able to recommend appropriate provision.

> *Kadin: I sometimes feel that parents treat us like we're a babysitting service that they're away for the whole day and as long as we've got them they're not really aware what their children are doing and not doing, I think it is, maybe I shouldn't say this, but sometimes I think erm - parents don't really take things on board and ask enough questions…questioning whether their child's in the right place.*

Kadin seems to attribute blame to others rather than taking responsibility for how she and the staff in the resource base might change to meet the needs of the child. This attribution of blame to others seems to reflect a sense of separation between the staff in the resource base provision and others. It also suggests that the child should fit with mainstream provision and gives the impression that children should either fit into mainstream *or* a special school.

Sam also talks about separation between the mainstream and the resource base attached to the school. Sam reported that following a recent inspection, OFSTED assessed that the school required improvement with regard to inclusive practice, which is why Sam moved to support a child from the resource base in the mainstream school.

> *Sam: OFSTED came in and decided that what was happening needed improvement and that the children weren't getting the correct uh, what's the word I mean? What's the work when they put them into the classroom again?*
>
> *Interviewer: Inclusion?*
>
> *Sam: Yeah, so they weren't getting that properly. So they're not getting that so what the school decided to do was take the two older children to see if they could cope in mainstream and I was put with them…I moved over with them and took them for the whole day in there without any- with trying to cut off the resource base to them so they didn't have any of the perks that the ASD children have, like the sensory room- trying to take that away from these two children to see how they coped.*

This suggests that change is taking place in the school system to promote inclusion; however, perhaps this newly introduced change has not yet been understood by Sam. Sam did not seem to be able to find the words to talk about inclusion, which could suggest that Sam may lack knowledge and understanding of the concept. In this quote I noticed the interesting use of the word "*perks*" when Sam talked about the sensory room, which could suggest this is viewed as a reward or an advantage rather than a resource to support inclusion. This could be interpreted as a reflection of Sam's apparent underlying beliefs and values about hard work, and the idea that people need to work for what they have.

> *Sam: You don't get anywhere unless you work for it- I was never given pocket money, I had to go out and get my own money, it was the case of if you wanted stuff you had to prove that you could have that stuff, so that's how I've done it with these [children]… they need to understand that you don't get things in life unless you work for it, that's how I deal with the two children I have.*

This could also be interpreted as a lack of understanding about why the children might benefit from strategies such as the sensory room to help them be included within the mainstream environment. It is possible that these values have influenced Sam's interpretation of the strategies to support inclusion outlined in the EBP program, which he describes as "perks". Sam also seems to be falling back on his own values to guide his practice, as discussed in theme two.

Sam goes on again to express his confusion about whether he is part of mainstream or the resource base, which may be linked to wider systemic issues and the sense of separation between the resource base and the mainstream provision within Sam's perceptions of the school system.

> *Sam: My idea now is I'm still resource, it's what I was told two days ago- 3 months ago I was told I was mainstream,– mainstream with ASD children, It makes no sense.*

In this quote Sam expresses his confusion that he is considered as a mainstream member of staff but he is working with a child with ASD. This could suggest that Sam is finding it difficult

to integrate SEN and mainstream needs, and perhaps that he does not understand the principles of inclusion.

Echoes of Separation and Marginalisation

When Kadin and Sam talked about their experiences of the school system there seemed to be a sense of separation and marginalisation throughout their accounts; Kadin seemed to feel a sense of belonging to her team and more generally to the whole school system, but seemed to view other people working with the child, such as parents, EBP trainers, and professionals from external agencies as outsiders who do not understand what the school system is trying to achieve. In the following quote Kadin talks about how a parent of child in another school faced some difficulties, her use of a subject personal changed from talking about the third person to the more personalised "we".

> *Kadin: I just felt, er, there was one parent [on the EB program] that was going through a-not such a brilliant … she had certain issues that she was having to go through but you know, we were putting things in place, it takes time unfortunately.*

It initially seemed in the interview that Kadin was talking about a parent she had met on the EBP, who had experienced some difficulties, and it seemed that she had worked with this parent directly; however, when I clarified with Kadin whether she was talking about a parent with whom she herself had worked, she said it was not. Kadin's change of personal pronoun to the more personalised "we", despite not having worked with the parent suggests to me that Kadin may strongly identify with the school system as a whole and not only the school system in which she works. Kadin seems defensive on behalf of the school system and this defensiveness suggests a divide or sides rather than a collaborative approach. In Kadin's accounts there seems to be a strong sense of separation from others who are not in the school system (for example, parents and EB trainers) and a view that they do not understand or appreciate what Kadin and the rest of the school system are trying to do. Kadin seems defensive on behalf of the school system and seems to feel undervalued by the 'others'.

> *Kadin: I just felt …slightly that it [the EB] was a bit biased… I just felt maybe slightly it would be good for them to actually understand what we do, and obviously there's legal requirements and certain things that we have to do, to protect ourselves and protect*

our children and obviously there's a system that we have to follow suit. …we don't get paid very well, you know, we work really hard hours and we do a lot for the children…we put a lot of effort and work and planning in they don't see the back scene of what actually goes on, and we do try to accommodate, you know this school is very good, we do accommodate for them you know, as much as we possibly can.

An alternative understanding might be that the EarlyBird trainers and parents identify what is not working and propose different things that school staff might do instead. I wonder if Kadin would interpret these strategies as others not understanding what they are trying to achieve with the current approach.

This alignment with the school system also seemed to impact on Kadin's relationship with the child. In the following quote Kadin talks about becoming wrapped up in the demands of the school system.

Kadin: Sometimes you are so wrapped up, or so in the system that you've got to do, this, this, this, this, this, we have to do this, this, this, it has to be certain du, du, du and you have to remember…actually it doesn't have to be that way.

The theme of separation and marginalisation also appeared within Sam's account of his experience of relationships within the school.

Sam: It seems to be a lot of cliques who you need to be in with or you don't need to be in with to get what you want.

Sam seemed to identify with the TAs in the resource base and felt a sense of separation from the rest of the school.

Sam: I felt like it was more that we were shut off to the school so it was a case of I didn't feel like we -me and the two other new girls who started and had no experience- were getting that support that we should have got to show us how it was done. It was more of a case of well you've got the job, you'll be doing this and have fun. The door

was locked. For us lot it was more about sticking together and telling each other how it worked, more self-grown than learnt from other people.

In Sam's account, he attempts to makes sense of the reasons why he was chosen as the TA to move across to the mainstream section of the school. In the following quote he attributes the reason to him being the only male in the unit.

Sam: I'm not really sure why it was me to be honest- I think I was me because I was most probably the only guy in there maybe- so yeah maybe just because I was the only guy everyone else there were all female so I don't know if it was a case of let's just keep it all girls in there and have the guy taken out…I know that they thought maybe they would respond more to the male than they did with the female because the two children didn't really listen to the female teachers so I think they just gave them to me to see how it worked out. I think. If not they didn't like me [laughs]- no but it's ok.

Throughout the interview Sam expressed confusion and frustration that he was the one moved to mainstream as he felt that there were other staff more experienced than him in the unit. Sam then adds that perhaps he was not liked by the others; although this was said in a jokey tone there seems to be an underlying sense of marginalisation and exclusion.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Several studies have begun to examine TAs' experiences of supporting pupils in a mainstream context; however, there have been few studies which examine how TAs make sense of their experiences utilising an in-depth and idiographic methodology such as IPA.

In this chapter I discuss the findings of the current study in relation to the research questions and the body of research discussed in chapter two; I particularly consider how these findings compare and contrast to the WPR model of TA practice. The first order research question asked broadly about TAs experiences of supporting pupils in mainstream provision; this related to participants perceptions of their role, their experiences of training and applying newly learnt skills and knowledge in practice, and the role their personal values played in their own practice. Incorporated within understanding TAs' overall experience is the more specific second order research question which asked about TAs experiences of working with others to support pupils in mainstream settings; this related to how the TA worked with the class teacher, particularly the level of collaboration between them and the balance of responsibility for the pupil between the TA and class teacher. This also included how valued TAs felt by others in the school system and a sense of marginalisation some felt in their working relationships with others.

These research questions and themes are overlapping and interconnected and are influenced by and influence each other; for example, analysis suggested that personal values are integral to participants' overall experiences of supporting pupils and so this was discussed in depth in relation to the first order research question. I also postulated that values influenced collaborative working and so the role of personal values is also discussed with regard to the second order research question relating to working with other professionals.

5.1 Research Question One: How do TAs Experience Supporting Pupils in a Mainstream School?

Analysis of TAs' experiences, outlined in the previous chapter, suggest that TAs primarily viewed their role as a way to help pupils cope in a mainstream school environment, which is suggestive of a gap between the pupil and their environment. In order to connect the two, TAs often seemed to take the role of a 'bridge builder' or 'gap filler'. This raised questions about why the gap existed in the first place and implications for practice are discussed. The TAs in the sample had received the same training for supporting pupils with a diagnosis of ASD in the form of the EarlyBird Plus. TAs talked about their experiences of training and how it prepared them for their role. TAs accounts of how useful this training was to them differed, with one TA suggesting that they would have preferred a more experiential approach. Personal values were identified as a key factor in applying learning to practice for two participants, and the implications for existing theory are discussed.

5.1.1 Role Perceptions: Helping Pupils to Cope with the Mainstream Environment

All TAs in the sample spent time supporting pupils with a diagnosis of ASD on a 1:1 or 2:1 basis, in line with previous research findings (Blatchford, 2006; Collins & Simco, 2006; Peter Farrell et al., 2010). TAs broadly viewed their role in terms of helping the pupil to cope with the mainstream environment, which is suggestive of a rift between the pupil and their environment that may not be present for their peers who do not have 1:1 support. TAs placed differing emphasis on different aspects of practice (for example, direct teaching or emotional support) and this was influenced by what they perceived the child to need and for what they believed they were responsible (the balance of responsibility between the TA and the class teacher is discussed further in section 5.2.2). This suggests that TA practice is influenced by both the environment in which they work and the needs of the pupil, and may help to explain why the TA role seems inconsistent in much of the literature (Blatchford, Russell, et al., 2012). This finding is also consistent with descriptions of the TA as a chameleon, whereby their approach is changed in response to what is required in a given context (Nash, 2014) and with conceptualisations of the TA role that positions the TA

between the pupil and their environment, either as an 'intermediary' (Alborz et al., 2009), a 'barrier' (Blatchford et al., 2009) or a 'go between' (Lehane, 2015). In previous research, whether or not the TA role was viewed as a facilitator or barrier in helping the pupil to access the mainstream environment was linked to how effective TAs were at promoting independence and scaffolding learning (Blatchford et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2011).

In the current study a mixed picture emerged as to the level of independence TAs promoted when helping the child to access their environment. There was some evidence that TAs helped pupils to develop skills for independence and make adaptations to the environment to support independence in relation to self-care and learning; for example, Kadin's use of the Picture Exchange System (Bondy & Frost, 1994), Ash's experiences of scaffolding learning, and Sam's communication of high expectations for the pupils. However, on other occasions TAs seemed to fill a gap for the pupil; for example, when Ash talked about emotional regulation she talked about how she regulated *for* the child, so that peers were not disturbed and the pupil could behave in an 'appropriate' way in the classroom. In this example the TA seems to make up for delays in the pupil's emotional skills with their own skills so that the pupil is able to access a learning environment pertaining to the majority. This is comparable to the findings of Blatchford et al. (2009) which suggest that when delivering pedagogical instruction, TAs often gave pupils the answer rather than help them to develop skills to find the answer for themselves. The findings from the current study suggested that TA's positioning between the pupil and the environment could mean that they can act as both a bridge builder and a gap filler. Drawing on findings of the DISS (Blatchford et al., 2009) and the WPR (Webster et al., 2011), TAs may facilitate development by acting as a bridge builder, which is underpinned by theories of social learning theory and scaffolding, and aims to help children develop skills in order to promote independence. On the other hand, TAs may act a barrier by filling a perceived gap with their own knowledge and skills rather than build the bridge to help the pupil develop these skills for themselves, which is in line with the findings by Nash (2014).

This conceptualisation of the TA as a gap filler raises questions as to why a gap between the pupil and the environment exists to begin with. The WPR (Webster et al., 2011) posits that TAs should be adequately supported within the school system by reconsidering 1:1 methods

of deployment to increase contact with the class teacher and by providing training to help them develop pedagogical skills and become bridge builders, in order to improve outcomes for pupils. This conceptualisation goes someway to consider how TAs should be supported to support pupils in mainstream classrooms; however emphasis is placed on the TA being the potential problem or barrier. A conceptualisation of a TA as a barrier suggests that the environment is appropriate and adequate for the pupil. A conceptualisation of TAs as a potential gap filler suggests that a gap exist between the pupil and the environment that the TA is filling. This opens up discussion about the pupils' wider learning environment and raises questions as to why the gap exists in the first place, suggesting that the environment was not appropriately adapted for the child. The problem of TA practice outlined in previous research (Blatchford et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2011) is therefore reconceptualised as a problem with the wider learning environment not meeting the needs of pupils identified as having SEN.

This shift in conceptualisation calls for a two pronged approach to supporting TA practice. Firstly, in line with recommendations made by Blatchford et al. (2009) TAs can be supported to develop skills in mediation of learning and development through training and collaborative working with teachers. These factors contributing to TA practice are discussed further in section 5.1.2 and section 5.2.1 respectively in relation to the findings of the current study. Secondly, if adaptations were to be made to the environment at a systemic level, this would make the school environment more readily accessible to all pupils, not only the pupils who's development and progress fall within the average range, in line with conceptualisations of *full inclusion* (Ainscow, 1995; Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006). The TA could focus on supporting these adaptations to the wider environment rather than offering individual support for pupils. This is in line with Norwich's (2002) suggestions for inclusive practice that support should be targeted to change the system to reduce barriers to participation, as well as being targeted at an individual level. This would also fit with Reindal's (2008) recommendation that to resolve the tensions related to differing constructions of inclusive practice an arena needs to be created where education professionals can consider *both* the individual needs of the child as well as the wider social context. It is likely to be unrealistic to expect the school environment to meet *all* the needs of *all* pupils (Reindal, 2008); however, if attention is also focused on changing the

environment, the gap between the child and the environment could be reduced, which may in turn reduce the perceived need for 1:1 TA deployment. For example, TA practice to support pupils' emotional regulation could include:

- Employing strategies to develop pupils' emotional regulation skills, that would benefit *all* pupils; for example strategies could include: the *Incredible 5 Point Scale* (Buron & Curtis, 2012), which teaches pupils how to recognise and scale the intensity of emotional responses to triggers; emotion focused problem solving, which teaches the pupil how to consider different emotional responses (Gottman, 2011); and mindfulness techniques which have been demonstrated to help pupils feel calmer and engage more readily with learning (Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurtz, & Walach, 2014).

- Adapting the environment to meet the needs of pupils in order to minimise the gap between individual pupils and their environment. This could include strategies such as reducing sensory stimulation such as uncluttered displays and dimming lights, preparing autism friendly classrooms and sectioning off more contained areas, providing opportunities for sensory stimulation, visually communicating routines and expectations, and ensuring that work activities can be completed by pupils of a range of abilities. With support of the class teacher the TA could play an important role in environmental management in order to support all pupils in the classroom.

EPs and senior leaders could provide support for TAs to carry out the above roles in a number of ways, including providing training and development opportunities, which are discussed further in section 5.1.2, and collaboration between the TA and class teacher, as discussed in section 5.2.1. These aims also link to the debate discussed in chapter two about how inclusion should be defined and understood by individual schools; for example, how much the learning environment should be adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils, and how this has been implemented through school policies and practice. It will therefore be important for school staff to develop a common understanding about what inclusion means and how it can be implemented. This is considered further in section 5.1.3 in relation to developing a platform of shared values, and in chapter six in consideration of implications for the school system and educational psychology practice.

5.1.2 TA Experiences of Training

All TAs in the current study reported that the EarlyBird Plus (EBP) training helped TAs to develop knowledge and skills related to their role which influenced their experiences of practice. In particular the EBP was helpful in terms of understanding specific needs associated with a diagnosis of ASD, building their confidence in their own ability, and aiding communication with pupils. For some TAs the EBP also seemed to facilitate development of more inclusive values.

Increased Understanding of ASD

All participants talked about their increased understanding of ASD and helped them to realise that every child is different, rather than assuming that all children with a diagnosis of ASD are the same in some way. The TAs seemed to believe that it was important to understand the underlying reasons for behaviour and what factors might contribute to it; the EBP helped two of them, Jem and Ash, to develop skills to do this, and these findings are in line with evaluations of the EBP programme which demonstrated that TAs reported increased knowledge of ASD and strategies to support behaviour (Peters & Scott-Roberts, 2014; Silvey & Mak, 2009). This is also consistent with the aim of the EBP programme, which is to help attendees understand ASD, and understand the function of behaviours in order to manage these behaviours (Shields, 2004). Kadin reported that her team were already using the strategies taught on the EBP and this may be explained by her being based in the resource base, as resources bases are more likely to use functional behavioural analysis techniques than the main school (Frederickson, Jones, & Lang, 2010). Sam reported that he found it more useful to consider underlying reasons for behaviour through trial and error, without using a framework. This could be linked to his preference for experiential learning or personal values which are discussed further in section 5.1.3. Training that helps TAs to consider potential environmental triggers would also be important in a TA role which aims to adapt and change the environment to meet the needs of the pupil, as outlined in the previous section relation to the TA role.

Increased Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Two participants (Jem and Ash) talked about their increased confidence in their role following their attendance at the EBP programme. Confidence was talked about in term of confidence in their own skills in order to complete tasks related to their role. This particular type of confidence can be defined as self-efficacy (a belief in one's own ability to complete a task effectively; Bandura, 1994). This supports previous research which suggests that the beliefs TAs have about their own abilities and knowledge can impact on their self-efficacy, which can in turn impact on their behaviour and practice (Higgins & Gulliford, 2014). Although all participants described an increase in confidence and self-efficacy, not all participants appeared to apply the training to practice to the same extent. Jem, Ash and Kadin reported that they used elements of the training in practice, whereas Sam did not find the frameworks useful. In my analysis I linked this to Sam's own preferences for learning, and personal values, which is further discussed in section 5.1.3.

Improved Communication Skills

All TAs in the current study spoke about how learning from the EBP had helped them to communicate more clearly with the pupil by simplifying their language. This is consistent with previous evaluations of the EBP (Peters & Scott-Roberts, 2014; Silvey & Mak, 2009). Jem's confidence and job satisfaction increased after learning how to communicate with the child with whom she works, and Jem reported that this has resulted in an improved response from the pupil, with whom she has since been able to build a relationship. As ASD is characterised by difficulties with social communication (Frith & Happé, 1994), arguably these fundamental skills related to communication will also underpin any other interventions and strategies employed by the TA.

Promotion of Inclusive Values

Training also seemed to help some TAs to let go of their expectations of what they felt the pupil should be doing and instead respond to and accept the pupil as an individual. Kadin talked about how she was able to respond more flexibly to the child following the programme, rather than trying to coerce them into behaving in the way she thought they should do. Kadin reported that sometimes she felt she became caught up in the expectations of the school system. Rix (2015) argues that professionals can get caught up in

their function within a system that pertains to the majority, which can ignore logical sense. In this example in the current study this would suggest that the TAs purpose to help the pupil meet targets may push the child in a direction that does not necessarily work because these targets have been set with the 'average' pupil in mind. However, an acceptance of difference seemed to help the TA to respond to the pupils' needs rather than attempting to change the pupil to fit with the system, more in line with the definition of inclusion proposed by Ainscow (1995). The EBP and other training which focuses on accepting diversity may therefore help to promote inclusive principles and values.

These benefits of increased understanding, simplified communication, and increased adult confidence in dealing with difference have been identified by previous research on the EBP as benefits of the program (Peters and Scott-Roberts, 2014). They have also been identified as important benefits of more generic TA training (Brown and Devechi, 2013). This suggests that these benefits are not unique to the EBP programme and the skills learnt on the programme are likely to benefit all pupils, not only pupils with a diagnosis of ASD. Training such as the EBP may therefore be most beneficial if it is delivered more widely to all school staff and not only the TA who has been allocated to the target pupil. However, the EBP is offered by the local authority following an official diagnosis of ASD being made within the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and the funding for the programme is linked to this diagnosis. This system whereby funding is based on assessment of individual need can act as a barrier to broader inclusive practice within schools (Rix, 2015). Although the EBP's aids understanding and skills in relation to supporting pupils with ASD and helps the TA to identify triggers in the pupils' environment, which can all be considered fundamental to inclusive practice, the EBP may therefore emphasise a medicalised and individualist model of educational practice. The delivery of the program to a TA who has been allocated on a 1:1 basis may therefore perpetuate an approach that focuses on the individual rather than inclusion in general by focusing and adapting the learning environment. This has implications for the delivery of the EBP and for integration of these principles within an inclusive school environment.

Although most TAs talked about how they had used the knowledge and skills developed from the EBP training in practice, one TA (Sam) reported that the theory and frameworks

underpinning the EBP were not useful and he chose not to use them. This finding demonstrates that a direct link between providing opportunities for training and practice cannot always be assumed and that TAs may need further support in order to use training materials. This provides an additional consideration for TA practice, which was not highlighted in the WPR (Webster et al., 2011). Analysis in the current study suggested that beliefs about the usefulness of training and application to practice could be partly explained by the TAs' preferences for learning (for example, either from practice or theory). This supported the findings of Symes and Humphrey (2011a) who found that some TAs reported that it was more valuable to learn from experience rather than training. It will be important that TAs are supported to learn from their experiences in a structured way; for example, through reflective practice or on the job training schemes such as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), and that they feel that this experience is valued by others. Beliefs about training in the current study could also be explained by TAs' personal values, which influenced whether or not TAs applied learning to practice, which will be discussed in the next section.

5.1.3 The Influence of Personal Values on TA Practice

Analysis of participant's accounts suggested that values played an important role in their practice. Values can be defined as "*a person's stable, internalised belief about a desired state, goal or behaviour of how he or she should act, perceive or judge environmental stimuli*" (Elizur & Sagie, 1999; Perrewé & Hochwarter, 2001, cited in Hyde & Weatherington, 2010, p.; p. 153). The value systems held by individuals influences the decisions they make (Baron, Byrne, & Branscombe, 2006). It is not surprising that values have been highlighted as influential in TA practice, as personal and professional values have been identified to influence decision making for a number of professional roles including nursing (Degazon, 2008), psychiatry and mental health practice (Fulford, 2011; Fulford, Dickenson, & Murray, 2008; Woodbridge & Fulford, 2004), Teaching (Waite, 2011) and educational psychology (Allen & Hardy, 2013). Less appears to be written on the role of personal and professional values for Teaching Assistants, and the key research papers on TA practice outlined in chapter two pay little acknowledgement to the role of values in TA practice. Although TA characteristics are considered to influence TA practice in the WPR model, the role of values within this model

has not been considered. This component of the WPR was also considered the least important by the authors (Webster et al., 2011).

Findings from the current study suggest that in particular values influenced how training was applied to practice. For Ash personal values relating to the importance of early intervention and "*not letting things get too big"* (Ash) was congruent with the early intervention aims of the EBP training programme and with her motivation to utilise frameworks from the programme. The congruence between Ash's values and the values of the training programme therefore seemed to have influenced Ash's decisions about how training was applied in practice. In previous research Higgins and Gulliford (2014) noted that TA values may influence application of training to practice, although they did not go into detail about what was meant by this. Sam's values may have also influenced his beliefs that the EBP frameworks were not useful. Sam's view that the pupils should *"like it or lump it"* suggested an acceptance of the way things are and he may therefore have been less motivated to change a situation through use of the frameworks from the EBP. This also suggests a sense of low self-efficacy in relation to understanding underlying reasons for the pupils' behaviour (Bandura, 1994). Low self-efficacy was linked to a decreased likelihood of applying knowledge and skills from training in practice in the study by Higgins and Guiliford (2014), and as discussed, although they mention that this links with personal values, the process of this was not discussed.

For Sam, his values about the importance of hard work, stemming from the teachings of his family of origin, appeared to influence his view that inclusive methods are *"perks"* and also his emphasis on the pupils needing to earn these 'privileges' rather than using them as a method to promote inclusion. This is suggestive of a belief that people can achieve if they only work hard enough. Although this may help to have high expectations for pupils identified with SEN, which has been demonstrated to foster inclusive practice (Ainscow et al., 2006), this view may not recognise the environmental barriers that can lead to inequality (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). This demonstrates how personal values may influence TA practice and also suggests that TAs' values about inclusion are likely to be influenced by their own life experiences. This supports Rix's (2015) view that beliefs and values about

inclusive education are based on life experiences of inclusion in society, which is captured in the following quote regarding a debate he had with another parent about inclusive practice.

> *We were part of the things we had seen, heard and felt; we were part of a process emerging from interpretations and understandings, from all that we had witnessed or shared. This life of experience was our version of the world. So when I engaged in an argument with him, I was not engaging in an argument with an individual, but with his entire history and he with mine.*
>
> (Rix, 2015; p.102)

This illustrates how life experiences and upbringing may influence beliefs and values related to inclusion and how discussions about inclusion are linked to cultural, social and historical experiences. This has implications for EPs working with TAs, and indeed all school staff; Where the EP's aim is to instigate systemic change it will be important to remember that the EP is not engaging with an individual or a group of individuals, the EP is instead engaging with an infinite combination of cultural and social values, histories and experiences of inclusion and segregation. It is also important to recognise that Sam regarded himself as understanding of SEN, especially in comparison to the class teacher. Sam may therefore not regard some of his views as non-inclusive. This contradiction could be explained by the view that values can be so deeply embedded that the individual may not recognise how they influence their behaviour (Murphy, 1993). It therefore seems important for TAs and school staff more broadly, to understand how their own deeply held beliefs, values and upbringing may impact on their practice, and how these relate to the core values of the school and education system in which they work.

One way to further reflect on and understand values may be through a focus on Values Based Practice (VBP; Fulford, 2011). VBP is an approach developed within mental health service delivery which aims to deal with complex and conflicting values. It argues that tensions arise from the different perspectives of different stakeholders (including patients and different members of staff), grounded within their own unique value systems. Within a school context this might include a tension between the values of the TA, teacher and

parents. VBP does not seek to change values; instead it argues that by exploring differences and similarities in value systems, a platform of shared values can be created, which facilitates consensus and direction. It is therefore essential that a shared platform can be created in which school professionals, including TAs, are able to discuss these values and experiences and the influence of these values on practice. This is inter-connected with the school's ethos and shared values, and a commitment to making these concepts useful, accessible, and applicable for all staff.

5.2 Research Question Two: What are TAs' experiences of working with other school staff to support pupils in mainstream schools?

The second order research question in this study was informed by previous research findings outlined in chapter two, which highlighted the importance of collaboration for TAs. Analysis of TAs' experiences in the current study, outlined in chapter four, suggested that there was considerable divergence between participants' accounts of their working relationships with class teachers with regard to the level of collaborative working and the balance of responsibility between the TA and class teacher for the pupils in the class. Most participants felt that their contribution was valued by others, although one TA (Sam) felt exploited and taken for granted by the school system. Two TAs in the current study (Kadin and Sam) talked about their experiences of working with others within the wider education system and their experiences of inclusion, or rather marginalisation within that system; this was not discussed by the other two TAs

5.2.1 Collaborative Working with the Class Teacher

Differences existed between participants' accounts as to how collaboratively they worked with the class teacher. Ash and Jem talked about collaboration in terms of a collaborative web of communication between the TA, teacher, parents, and the pupil. These findings supported previous research which highlighted that collaboration can inform more targeted support for pupils in the class (Cozens, 2014) and helps the TA to know how to adapt the task to meet the needs of the pupil (Docherty, 2014); the latter of which links to previous findings that collaboration can facilitate TA agency (Docherty, 2014). Findings from the current study also

suggested that this collaboration helped the TA to respond to the changing needs of the pupil, as was identified by Symes and Humphrey (2011b). Jem also highlighted the importance of including the pupil themselves within this web of communication.

On the other hand, when Kadin and Sam talked about working with the class teacher there was little evidence of collaborative working, in line with previous findings that although collaborative working is important to the TA role, it does not always happen in practice (Blatchford et al., 2009; Mackenzie, 2011). Kadin reported that she did not work collaboratively with the teacher and it seemed that the teacher was in charge whilst she followed the teacher's lead. Kadin believed she had little input into the day to day planning for the pupils with whom she worked. Kadin's everyday practice seemed to be more tightly controlled by the class teacher and Kadin reflected that she had enjoyed her previous role more where she had been able to make her own decisions. These findings provide further evidence of a link between collaboration and the personal agency of TAs in line with the findings by Docherty (2014). Sam also reported that he did not work collaboratively with the class teacher, and this could be explained by the blurring of boundaries between a TA and teacher role which can act as a barrier to collaboration (Nash, 2014; Saddler, 2014). Instead of collaborative working there seemed to be a sense of competition with the class teacher regarding who should receive credit for pupils' progress. Although the current study did not explore why this might be, this could be related to Sam's aspirations to be a class teacher and blurred boundaries between the two roles, which is discussed further in the next section. The emphasis in education on raising attainment and awarding credit to individual staff members for pupil progress may have also contributed to this sense of competition between Sam and the class teacher.

Collaborative Working and TA Status

Analysis suggested that status and power relations between the TAs and the class teacher in the current study influenced collaborative practice. Most TAs in the current study talked about the higher status and superiority of the teacher; for example, Jem's comment that "*teachers know everything*", and the TAs appeared to respect this hierarchy. They also seemed to work within, and be guided by, the boundaries set by the class teacher. Analysis suggested that Jem and Ash worked more collaboratively with the class teacher than the

other participants, and this supports previous findings that a respect for the hierarchy in the classroom can facilitate collaborative working (Nash, 2014). The current study suggested that a respect for the teacher's higher status and collaboration is linked to a sense of trust and openness to the class teacher's influence, which adds to previous findings (Cozens, 2014; Nash, 2014; saddler, 2014). However, collaboration is a two way process and although this study suggests that TA openness, trust and respect influences collaborative practice, it does not consider how the class teacher may have influenced collaborative working as their perspectives were not obtained. An in depth exploration of how status is established and developed in this working relationship would therefore be an interesting and important avenue for future research.

Kadin appeared to respect this hierarchy in the class room but there was little evidence of collaborative working throughout her account, which suggests that other factors also influence collaboration. Although it is not clear from the current study what these may be, in section 5.2.4 I speculate a link between the ethos of inclusion within the wider school system and collaborative practice between the TA and the class teacher. As discussed in the previous section, Sam reported that he was responsible for pupils' learning in a similar way to what would be expected of a teacher's role, and he appeared to view himself as a higher status than the class teacher for the two pupils with whom he worked. It is possible that this stemmed from a lack of trust in the class teacher's skills and knowledge about SEN. This lack of trust may in turn affect collaborative working (Lehane, 2016; Cozens, 2014).

5.2.2 Balance of Responsibility between the TA and Class Teacher

Participants in the current study appeared to take more responsibility for the pupil than simply offering support, consistent with previous findings (Blatchford et al 2006; 2009). For Jem, Ash and Kadin the balance of responsibility ultimately rested with the class teacher, although they also felt responsibility for some aspects of pupil's development such as their overall wellbeing or differentiating materials so that the pupil could understand. This is in line with guidelines in the Code of Practice which states that the class teacher is responsible for the progress of *all* pupils (DfE, 2014). These participants appeared to value the level of responsibility they held, and appreciated when they were able to make independent

decisions and when this input was valued, which is considered further in the discussion about the importance of a valued contribution in section 5.2.3.

On the other hand, Sam seemed to take total responsibility for the pupils with whom he worked, which could be explained by him filling a perceived gap in the practice of the class teacher, and by his aspirations and goals to train as a class teacher, which seemed to link to a raised status in the classroom. Sam believed that the teacher did not assume any responsibility for the pupils with whom he worked. In previous research Mackenzie (2011) found that when the teacher does not take on responsibility for the child this role can then fall to the TA. The TA may therefore be more likely to shoulder more responsibility, in order to fill a gap similar to the idea discussed in section 5.1.1 when considering TAs' experiences of supporting the pupil. This in line with descriptions in the literature of 'role reversal' (Symes and Humphrey, 2012) and blurred boundaries between the TA and teacher roles and responsibilities where the TA takes on the role of the teacher for the child with whom they work on a 1:1 basis (Blatchford et al. 2009), which is apparent within Sam's account. This has implications for the equity of education for pupils identified with SEN (Giangreco, 2010) and also for the ethical principle of integrity whereby roles should not be carried out where adequate training and experienced has been attained (for example, BPS, 2006).

TAs taking on a high level of responsibility for pupils has also been attributed to the 1:1 method of deployment where the TA is 'velcroed' to the pupil and acts as a barrier to the class teacher (Giangreco, 2010); however, this 1:1 method of deployment cannot sufficiently explain this phenomenon of role reversal within the sample of the current study as all participants worked on a 1:1 basis with the pupil, but not all TAs took on this additional responsibility. Saddler (2014) argues that role blurring may be more likely to occur where TAs are over qualified for their role, and Giangreco (2010) attributes the concept of role reversal to the 'training trap', whereby TAs assume more responsibility that the class teacher after they have received training due to assumptions made by the class teacher that the TA is more knowledgeable about the child's needs than they are. Again all TAs in the current study received the same level of training but not all TAs assumed total responsibility for the pupils with whom they worked. Sam's aspirations to train as a class teacher set him apart from the other TAs in the sample, which may have motivated him to take on more responsibility than

would ordinarily be expected of a TA. Although Sam was not 'over qualified', he was motivated to gain teaching experience. Although the class teacher's perceptions of Sam's skills were not sought, Sam did believe that he had superior knowledge to the teacher in terms of understanding pupil need and inclusion. Gaining information about the teacher's views may have given an insight into how this dynamic may have developed between Sam and the class teacher, and this presents a limitation of the current study. However, these findings do suggest that in Sam's case the increased level of responsibility he took on may be linked to his own goals and aspirations to be a class teacher, and not just the perceptions of the class teacher as was previously suggested (Giangreco, 2010). This highlights the TA as an active agent, who is able to shape their own practice in relation to collaborative working, rather than simply passive recipients of the systemic factors that can also shape their role, as is suggested by previous research (Blatchford et al., 2009, Giangreco, 2010).

5.2.3 Feelings of Value and Exploitation

TAs in the current study wanted to make a contribution in the class room and valued the times when they were able to respond to pupils' needs in a flexible way, using their own initiative. Most participants in the current study felt that their contribution was valued and noticed by the class teacher, and this seemed to be important to them, with two participants, Jem and Ash, explicitly noting that this made them happy and improved job satisfaction. Sam's account seemed to diverge from the other participants with regard to how supported and valued he felt in his role. Sam seemed to feel exploited by the school leadership team and frustrated at the level of responsibility he believed was required of him; Sam seemed to attribute this sense of exploitation to the school leadership team taking advantage of his aspirations to gain experience to train as a teacher. This could help to explain why Sam did not feel included within the wider school system (which will be discussed further in section 5.2.4), as Nash (2014) found that senior school leaders have a pivotal role in in how valued and included TAs feel. In Sam's account of his experiences, there was also a sense of being *"bled"* by others in his role, and in my interpretation this evoked a sense of being 'used' by others in the same way a resource might be used. This links to a pattern that was identified by O'Brien and Garner (2001), and discussed by Lehane (2016), that authors of TA research often talk about "effective utilisation" of TAs which can leave TAs can feeling like a commodity; such language

can foster a sense of exclusion for the TA, rather than being included as part of a collaborative team (Lehane, 2016). As was discussed in section 5.2.1 Sam did experience the least collaboration in his relationship with the teacher, compared to the other participants.

These findings from the current study emphasise two aspect of the WPR model that the authors argued are the least important components. Firstly, findings stress the importance of providing TAs with the appropriate *conditions of employment* not only to safeguard TAs but also to promote collaborative practice and inclusion. Secondly, the findings highlight that TAs are active agents within their own practice. As discussed in previous sections, findings from the current study indicated that TA practice and decision making can be influenced by their own goals and personal values. This highlights how when considered more broadly, TA characteristics can also play an important role in TA practice, as well as the systemic support emphasised in the WPR. It will therefore be important to consider how TAs can be supported in their continuing professional development in order to make a valued contribution within boundaries that provide TAs with an appropriate level of responsibility. Recommendations for practice in order to support TAs at both a systemic and individual level are considered further in chapter six.

5.2.4 Marginalisation and Exclusion throughout the School System

Analysis of findings in the current study suggested that Kadin perceived a split between herself and her colleagues in the resource base, and other professionals working externally to the school system. Kadin experienced a sense of belonging with the staff in the resource base, but a sense of separation from others in the wider system. Kadin also believed that others did not understand the pupils' needs in the same way she and her colleagues did. This is suggestive of a split between Kadin, her colleagues and the pupil on one hand, and the rest of society (for example, external professionals) on the other. This is suggestive of the concept of *othering*. Othering is a form of marginalisation which *"Serves to mark and name those thought to be different from oneself"* (Weis, 1995, p.; p.17). Identities can be constructed in relation to this perception of the other, and positions of superiority and inferiority can be reinforced (Weis, 1995). Throughout Kadin's account she talked about how professionals working in external agencies were superior to her and her colleagues in terms of decision

making, as well as inferior in relation to knowledge and understanding of the pupil. Kadin felt that her contribution was not valued by these other professionals, the EBP trainers, and parents. This relates back to the discussion about power status in the classroom, which in Kadin's case can be applied instead to the wider social and education system. Previous research (Saddler, 2014; Cozens, 2014) has indicated that it is both important for the hierarchy of responsibility to be acknowledged and also for the different contributions to be equally valued in order to promote collaboration between TAs and other professionals.

Throughout the accounts of Kadin and Sam there seemed to be a general sense of exclusionary practice towards pupils throughout the school system, as well as they themselves feeling marginalised in some way. It is possible that Kadin's apparent feeling of being an 'other', compared to professionals and parents, may be linked to Lehane's (2016) proposition that TAs often align themselves with the child, and therefore experience the marginalisation experienced by the child, and therefore view themselves as "lesser". Kadin may therefore have viewed herself as affiliated with the marginalised pupils in the resource base and therefore may have experienced the same sense of marginalisation herself. This link between feeling valued and experiences of inclusion was not explicitly explored in the current study and so it is important to recognise that this link is speculative. The other two participants in the study did not talk about different types of provision and so it was not possible to consider how they made sense of the organisation of provision or make interpretations about their perceptions of inclusion. These same two TAs also did not report any feelings of exclusion and marginalisation in their roles. This suggests that for this sample the TAs who experienced some form of marginalisation also worked in schools where exclusionary practice was apparent. Symes and Humphrey (2011b) identified that components of an inclusive school culture involved TAs feeling included in the school system themselves. Although this link was not explicitly stated by participants, it is possible that their own experiences linked to a wider sense of exclusion in the school system. It would be interesting in future research to gain the perspectives of pupils and consider whether they feel more marginalised in a system where school staff also feel marginalised.

TAs' sense of marginalisation and inclusive ethos of the school may also be linked to collaborative working. Previous authors have suggested that when TAs and class teachers

worked collaboratively this promoted an environment of inclusion (Falkmer, Anderson, Joosten, & Falkmer, 2015; Robertson, Chamberlain, & Kasari, 2003). In the same vein, Mackenzie (2011) found that difficulty in working collaboratively with the class teacher was attributed to exclusionary practices in working relationships across the school. This suggests that collaborative working between the TA and the class teacher, and the inclusive ethos of the wider school system are linked. Tentative evidence for this link can be found in the current study; the TAs who worked least collaboratively with the class teacher were also the two TAs who experienced experiences of exclusion and marginalisation. Although this link was not explicitly made by the participants, the current study does provide tentative evidence for the claim that inclusive ethos and collaborative practice are linked in some way. This also presents as a logical argument; Practice in individual makes up the practice of the whole school, and where the whole school has a generally inclusive ethos TAs may be more likely to be included in individual classrooms.

These findings highlight the importance of promoting inclusion throughout the whole school system in order to support TAs and the pupils with whom they work. As Giangreco (2010) argued, by focusing on TA practice only the symptoms of an exclusionary education system are dealt with rather than getting to the root of the problem. Rix (2015) argues that in order to embrace principles of inclusion the education system must move away from individualism and its focus on medicalisation and deficit and embrace ideas of inter-dependence. The emphasis should be on the community of the school rather than the assessment and provision for any individual pupil, which perpetuates a culture of in and out groups (Johannesson, 2006). The WPR model goes someway to placing responsibility with the school system for the support offered to pupils by TAs, in particularly by advocating for a move away from offering 1:1 support; however, the model remains focused on TA practice and does not consider how the school environment and ethos may influence TA practice. The current study contributes to the existing body of research by highlighting the importance of an inclusive ethos to TAs experiences, and by making possible links with other aspects of TA practice such as collaboration with the class teacher. This thereby highlights an area of development for understanding and explaining TA practice.

5.3 Chapter Conclusions

The primary research question in this study asked how TAs experienced supporting pupils in a mainstream school. In conclusion, all TAs were deployed to work on a 1:1 (or in one case 2:1) basis in order to support pupils diagnosed with ASD. Their accounts suggested that they viewed their key role as supporting pupils to cope with the mainstream environment. TAs usually offered direct support to the pupil by acting as a bridge, or filling the gap with their own skills. All participants had attended the EBP training programme and they talked of their experiences of the training and their experiences of putting it into practice. Training was generally viewed as useful for supporting pupils with a diagnosis of ASD and contributed to TA practice, although analysis suggested that the benefits were mostly generic and could be applied to *all* staff supporting *all* pupils, not only staff working with pupils diagnosed with ASD. TAs' application of knowledge and skills from training was influenced by their own personal values. Although the finding that personal values influenced TA practice was not surprising, it highlighted limitations of the WPR model of TA practice, which minimised the individual influence of TAs in favour of a focus on factors in the system that that influence TA practice.

The secondary research question in the current study asked how TAs experienced working with other professionals to support pupils. The importance of collaboration with the class teacher was highlighted and the influence of TA status on collaboration was discussed. Analysis demonstrated that the balance of responsibility between the pupil and the class teacher was most often weighted towards the class teacher, although TAs felt some responsibility for the pupil. In one case the TA took complete responsibility for the pupils with whom he worked and this was explained in the analysis by his own goals and aspirations and filling a perceived skills gap of the class teacher. Some TAs felt marginalised in the systems in which they worked, which could be linked to the marginalisation of SEN pupils within this system. This links back to the importance of developing an inclusive school ethos in order to support TAs and the pupils with whom they work.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

In this final chapter I begin by offering a summary of the findings, followed by a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study within an evaluation of its quality as an IPA study through application of the criteria outlined by (Yardley, 2000). I then go on to consider recommendations for future research, and recommendations for educational psychology practice.

6.1 Summary of the Current Study

This study aimed to understand TAs' experiences of supporting pupils in a mainstream primary school, and their experiences of how they work with other professionals in their role. The specific research questions were:

1. How do TAs experience supporting pupils in a mainstream primary school?
2. How do TAs experience working with other school staff to support pupils in mainstream schools?

This study offered a unique and original insight into TA experiences through employing an IPA methodology. Guided by IPA's philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and hermeneutics, I was able to understand their experience from their perspective through my own unique interpretation as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP).

The findings of the current study highlighted that TAs play a key role in support for pupils in mainstream primary schools. TAs viewed their role as a means to help pupil's cope with the mainstream environment. TAs either seemed to fill a gap or build a bridge between the pupil and their environment. This raised questions as to why the learning environment was not easily accessible by the pupils themselves. I suggested that implications include supporting TAs to be bridges rather than gap fillers in order to help pupils to develop skills and promote learning. TAs could also take a role in the assessment and intervention of the wider learning environment in order to promote inclusion. TA training was generally useful to participants especially with regard to helping them to develop their confidence, their interpersonal skills and their understanding of specific needs related to ASD. These benefits seem applicable for all staff working with all pupils, not only TAs working on a 1:1 basis with pupils with a diagnosis of ASD. Delivery of the EBP or similar training could therefore be beneficial to a wider range of staff and may help to promote inclusive values. Personal values influenced TA practice and how TAs applied knowledge and skills from training to practice. This has not been considered by key research studies and models in the field and so this provides a unique contribution to knowledge. Collaborative practice between the TA and the class teacher was highlighted as important to TA practice. The degree to which TAs and teachers worked collaboratively varied

within TA accounts, as did the level of responsibility the TA assumed for the pupils with whom they worked. For some TAs collaborative practice and the level of responsibility held by TAs seemed to be, at least in part, influenced, by their status. Some TAs talked about their experiences of being marginalised and excluded within the school system and it was speculated that whether TAs feel included within the school system may be linked to the inclusion of pupils within the same school system as well as collaborative practice with the TA, therefore highlighting the importance developing an inclusive and collaborative ethos throughout the school system.

6.2 Strengths

This study was one of the first in the body of the TA practice literature to consider how TA values impact on TA practice, and therefore provides an original contribution to knowledge. This finding was an aspect of the current study, which I had not considered prior to data collection, as this had not been considered in key literature and models of TA practice. I think the current study highlighted the role of values as the data collection and analytical methods were sensitive to individual and personal experience; employing semi-structured interviews meant that I was able to follow up comments made by the participant outside of the interview schedule, and employing an IPA methodology offered space to explore participants' experiences from their perspective and gave me the freedom to follow their lead. The two participants who talked about values and upbringing in the current study made impromptu comments about their upbringing linked to their practice, which I then followed up with further questioning. On reflection I think it is this IPA approach, in both data collection and analysis that helped me to understand more about how values shape TA practice.

A methodological strength of the study included the homogeneity of participants, which is an important consideration for IPA research in order to increase understanding of shared experiences. All TAs in the current study supported pupils with a diagnosis of ASD, and all participants had attended the same training programme.

6.3 Limitations

Although the current study made new and original contributions to the understanding of the TA role in supporting children with ASD, the study contained several limitations:

Due to the study's small and limited sample, recruited within one local authority, it is not possible to generalise findings to the work experiences of all TAs working with pupils a range of different needs, with different training backgrounds, and within other local authorities nationwide. However, the strength of IPA research lies in its idiographic focus and it does not aim to generalise.

Secondly, this study explored my interpretation of participants' interpretations. As discussed in chapter three, this could be considered a limitation of the current study; however, I have attempted to address this potential limitation by being transparent about my own position as a researcher and about the research process (see section 6.4: Establishing Quality and Trustworthiness).

Thirdly, the data collection method of semi-structured interviews and the IPA method of analysis used in the study are themselves inherent with limitations (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Interviews do not necessarily reflect real life and are not likely to represent the participant's overall experience (Howitt, 2010). Instead an interview reflects a snap shot in time, and it is likely to be orientated to a specific type of experience. Interviews also rely heavily on language and articulation skills of the participant, and at times it was difficult for me to understand what the participant was saying due to an unfamiliar accent or difficulty with articulation. In some instances a participant acted out what she was trying to say, and although I asked the participant to put what she wanted to say into words or offered my own interpretation for the purpose of the recording, some idiosyncratic meaning was likely to have been lost.

Fourthly, I was not able to include participants' demographic information in order to protect their right to privacy and anonymity. In light of the importance of TA characteristics, personal goals, values, and status highlighted by the current study, this information may have deepened the analysis, for example, with regard to how long TAs had been in their role, their age, and their socio-economic and cultural background.

Fifthly, as a researcher inexperienced in IPA methodology, the questions I asked in the interview became more phenomenological and less structured as the study progressed. This was likely to be in response to ongoing reflection of the interview process (see Appendix F) and my increasing confidence as a researcher to follow the lead of the participant rather than adhere rigidly to the interview schedule. The data I gained from the last interview was therefore deeper and richer than the data I gained in the pilot interview; however I decided to include the data from the pilot interview as it was still interesting and relevant to the research questions of the study.

Finally, all literature in the study was gained from English speaking authors, which may have resulted in missing some useful information.

6.4 Establishing Quality and Trustworthiness

As discussed in chapter three, I aimed to produce a trustworthy and good quality study through the application of Yardley's (2000) criteria for good quality qualitative research. These four criteria included: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance, and in this section I consider these criteria in relation to the methodology and findings of the current study.

Sensitivity to context was established by developing my understanding of IPA as an approach and using the theoretical underpinnings to inform my analysis, which has been discussed in section 3.3.5. I also demonstrated sensitivity to context by drawing on the relevant research literature to inform my discussion of my own findings within the context of the wider socio-political milieu (Kaptein, 2011; Langdridge, 2007). As noted a limitation of this thesis was related to the method of semi-structured interviews used to collect data; sensitivity to the participants' wider expression of their experience (other than through verbal language) could have been improved through alternative methods including: film; participant diaries; and visual methods, such as artwork.

Commitment and rigour was sought by ensuring consistency between the recording of the interview and the transcript, ensuring that analysis was grounded within the participants' accounts and reflecting on how my own unique position as a researcher and as TEP has

impacted on the data and findings. Supervision was also used to generate alternative understandings of data and facilitate analytic thinking, referred to as 'logos' by the phenomenological and hermeneutic philosopher Heidegger (Smith et al., 2009). In utilising an IPA methodology I have not sought to uncover or reveal the 'pure' experience of a participant (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006), instead I acknowledged that this study provides one interpretation and understanding of the TA role and practice. As my aim was to interpret rather than uncover truth, I decided not to engage with the triangulation method of *member checking*, which checks how the account of the researcher corresponds with the account of the participant (Howitt, 2010).

On further reflection, member checking may have added an additional turn within the hermeneutic circle where participants might have made sense of my sense making of their sense making. Member checking within IPA has the potential for ethical tension regarding whose account to put forward in the event of disagreement. However, this could have been managed by clarity from the outset that participants' views would be incorporated *alongside* my own interpretations. Understanding any reasons for disagreement could have also added an extra dimension to the data and contributed to a richer understanding of the participant's dynamic experience. Although IPA recognises that the analysis provides an understanding of the participant's experience at that moment in time, grounded within Satre's theory of *becoming* (Guignon, 2004; Smith et al., 2009), I believe the commitment and rigour of the current study could have been enhanced through member checking.

Transparency and coherence was achieved by being clear about which interpretations were offered by the participant and which were offered by myself as the researcher in the write up of this study, and I have included a sample of how the data was coded in Appendix H. I attempted clarity in the write up of the methods, analysis, and personal context, including reflexive observations (Smith et al., 2009). Coherence can refer to how well the chosen methods fit with the underlying theoretical assumptions and how this theory is used in the analysis of findings (Yardley, 2000). In the current study my analysis was reflective of the hermeneutic circle, which refers understanding a small finding of the study in relation to the whole study and vice versa, this was in line with the method of analytical induction. Once I had analysed each transcript I then considered how this analysis related to the overview of

the participants' transcripts to create overall themes. After I had created themes, I referred back to each individual transcript to ensure that the overall themes were reflective of individual participant experience.

Impact and importance have been established by considering the unique contribution the study has made to the body of literature on TA support for children with ASD in mainstream schools. I presented my findings to the joint Educational Psychology and Autism Service in the borough where this study was completed. Following this presentation I facilitated a group discussion and we considered the implications for their practice, which included setting up a working group to consider how schools can effectively support TAs in the local authority. It was also suggested that it may be beneficial to begin school staff training sessions with a discussion about increasing awareness of personal values. Implications for schools and educational psychology practice are further outlined in sections 6.6 and 6.7 of this chapter. As discussed in section 3.3.4 when considering the issues of *non-maleficence and beneficence*, I could have included a question in the interview which asked whether TAs would like to change their practice and how they might achieve this. Inclusion of this question might have helped TAs to consider how they themselves can make changes and increased the impact of the research for the TAs taking part in the study directly following the interviews.

6.5 Possible Directions for Future Research

As discussed this study provides some preliminary evidence for the role values may play in the TAs' practice and in their application of training to practice. Further research is needed on the consideration of TA values in regard to applying training in practice. It would be interesting to explore the principles of value based practice (Fulford, 2011; Fulford et al., 2008; Woodbridge & Fulford, 2004) as applied to education. As part of this is would be beneficial to consider whether discussing and creating shared values, both between the TA and school staff in practice, and between the TA and trainers in training, influences TA practice.

This study explored TA experiences following their attendance at the EBP programme. It did not intend to evaluate the programme in itself, although further research to evaluate the impact of the EBP for school staff is clearly needed. The findings from the current study

suggest that the EBP can be a useful training programme for school staff, which influences TA practice and collaboration between professionals. Further research could focus on a comparison of TA experiences before and after they have completed the programme to consider whether the EBP influences a change in TA practice.

The nature of this study was to explore TAs' experiences of supporting pupils in a mainstream school and so the IPA methodology employed was an appropriate choice. An alternative future research project to explore the TA role and practice could include an action research project which would consider how TAs would like to change their own practice and supports them through this process.

As discussed in the limitations section, this study only considered the views and experiences of TAs. A multi-perspectival study could explore the experiences and perceptions of pupils and class teachers in order to consider how TA support is received and experienced by others with whom they work alongside.

6.6 Implications for the Education System

It can be seen that the TA role is varied and inconsistent and variation exists in the level of responsibility each TA takes for the child, which has implications for equality of opportunity for pupils identified as having an SEN. A standardised framework for school staff competencies could be introduced which clearly outlines the role and responsibilities of each professional, and considers the boundaries and overlaps between the two. This could also guard against TAs feeling exploited and unsupported in their role. A similar system called the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) is used as a tool for professional development and standardisation in the National Health Service (NHS). The KSF outlines the core knowledge and skills required for different jobs in the NHS across the six different dimensions of: communication; personal and people development; health, safety and security; service improvement; quality; and equality and diversity. The KSF would provide a useful starting point to consider how to standardise expectations and skills for TAs and help them to develop the skills required for the job.

The findings from the current study suggested that echoes of marginalisation and segregation were evident throughout the school system for some TAs and that some TAs seemed to have limited knowledge about inclusive values and principles. This highlights the importance of developing and promoting an inclusive school ethos, both in relation to pupils and TAs.

6.7 Implications for Professional Educational Psychology

This study explored and analysed TAs experiences of supporting pupils in mainstream schools, and the implications for the education system in which they work have been discussed in the previous section. In this section I consider the implications of the research findings for Educational Psychology practice. Traditionally the EP role has been linked to individual assessment of children with special educational needs and disability; however, the EP role is increasingly focused on supporting systemic changes in school in order to make lasting change to a wider number of pupils (Peter Farrell & Britain, 2006; Kelly, 2013). In order to support TA practice, EP support should therefore focus on helping the TA and class teacher to develop skills to work with pupils and with each other through offering training and consultation. EPs should also aim to support TAs and other school staff at a school wide level in relation to the implementation of policy and organisational values.

6.7.1 Training

Findings from the study suggested that at times TAs acted as a 'gap filler' and made up for the skills pupils needed to participate in a mainstream setting, rather than helping them to develop these skills themselves. Training in mediated learning approaches, emotional self-regulation approaches for the child, and 'scaffolding' skills (skills which support learning) would help TAs to develop skills to 'build a bridge' between the child and their environment, rather than act as an infill themselves and carry out the skill *for* the child.

Findings suggested that application of training in practice can be influenced by personal values and so it would be important to consider the role of values when EPs deliver training to TAs and other members of school staff. This could be through reflection of personal values and how these might compare with the underpinning values and the aims of the training programme, which could help to create a platform of shared values specifically relating to the agendas for inclusive education and raising standards. These could then be revisited at the

end of the training programme in order to consider any potential areas of tension and implications for application of training in practice within the school system.

In order to develop and promote an inclusive ethos, training could also focus on the examination of the role of values in order to create a platform of shared values and attempt to reconcile differing education agendas. However, it would be important that such training did not only apply to TAs and was instead delivered as part of a school wide consideration of values and inclusive ethos. It is also important to caution against upholding TAs to a different set of ideals compared to other school staff.

6.7.2 Consultation and coaching

EP Consultation (Gutkin & Curtis, 1990; Nolan & Moreland, 2014; Wagner, 1995) can promote inclusion as it offers an intervention at a systemic level where the focus is on changing the pupils' environment in order to reduce barriers in their education, which is grounded within social constructionism and aims to promote inclusive practice. This is in contrast to within-child conceptualisations which aim to change the pupil and adapt the pupil to the environment rather than the environment to the child. Consultation may therefore have an impact on other pupils as well as the target pupil and promote inclusive practice (Wagner, 1995). Wagner (1995) has argued that educational psychology consultations should be conducted with the problem holder, which generally is the class teacher as they hold overall responsibility for pupils (DfE, 2014). However, the findings from the current study suggest that it would be useful to include *both* the class teacher and TA in consultations as this would provide a space for them to engage in collaborative problem solving. Consultations grounded within a Values Based Practice framework, could also provide a safe space in which to reflect on how the values of school staff may influence their practice and seek to resolve any tensions identified. As an alternative to joint consultation, EPs could play a role in the professional development of TAs (and other school staff) through offering coaching sessions. Coaching models are based on the assumption that personal and professional development are interrelated (Adams, 2015) and would therefore be well placed to consider the roles of personal values in practice.

6.7.3 School-wide Systemic Interventions

EPs are also well placed to work with SENCos and Head Teachers to consider appropriate and effective forms of TA deployment in order to promote inclusion and pupil outcomes (Farrell, Balshaw, & Polat, 2000). EPs could also support schools at a whole school level by helping school leaders to develop inclusion policies and consider how the consistency between policy and practice could be strengthened. These aims could include various ways of working including the facilitation of action research projects and other forms of research and evaluation, consultation with SENCos and senior leaders, and provision mapping. This could be negotiated in initial planning meetings with senior leaders in consideration of the school improvement plan (Lagunowitsch, 2013).

Rix (2015) argues that the focus on individualism, productivity, and assessment within the education system may make it difficult for EPs to work in systemic ways and so it will be important for EPs to help create a sense of urgency to work in this way and draw on models of organisational change. One way to establish a sense of urgency to promote inclusion may be through helping schools to reconcile the inclusive education agenda with the government's focus on raising standards. This could be done by helping schools to consider their core values, and how this feeds in to their policies and interventions. EPs are also ideally placed to disseminate and reflect on the current research findings in order to help school leaders consider how best to deploy TAs; reflecting on the relevance of such findings to the school improvement plan may also help to develop a sense of urgency for change required for organisational change initiatives (Kotter, 1996).

6.8 Concluding Comments and Reflections

This study aimed to understand and analyse Teaching Assistants' experiences of supporting pupils in mainstream provision. It was hoped that this would illuminate factors relevant to the TA role and practice, as well as factors relevant to developing support for TAs themselves. The findings from the current study suggest that the participants' experiences

of the wider school system are integral to their experiences of supporting pupils. These include TAs' experiences of working with the class teacher, experiences of being included in the school system, and experiences of feeling valued in their role. The findings also suggested that values and family upbringing were important in their experience of supporting pupils, and these values often guided TA practice. Findings from the current study generally suggest that the TAs' experience of the EBP was positive and useful to their practice, especially with regard to their interactions with the pupil, although the benefits were general and could be useful to all staff working with pupils with a range of needs.

Conducting this research has been both a rewarding and challenging experience. I particularly enjoyed the data collection stage and meeting the participants. I felt privileged to be in a position to listen to these interesting experiences, and I was left with the impression that each TA cared about their role and the child with whom they worked. During analysis I felt both stimulated and uneasy about the interpretative aspect of IPA. It was interesting to consider the participants' experiences from several different angles and different possible interpretations in order to gain insights into their experiences. This process felt creative and thought provoking. However, at times it felt intrusive and I think I would have felt more comfortable with a method of analysis that co-constructs meaning with the participant in a more collaborative and ongoing way such as narrative analysis. Perhaps if I had included the process of member checking in the current study as I suggested in section 6.4, the analysis may have felt more collaborative and less intrusive. Member checking is a step I would include in future research.

This study has impacted on my own practice as a TEP and I now have a greater appreciation for the factors that can impact on inclusion in the classroom. Over the past three years I have embarked on a journey related to inclusive practice. I began the DEdPsy course with little understanding of the principle of inclusion; I was then intrigued by the principles of the social model and social constructionism, which cast an entirely new light for me on mental ill health and disability. On reflection, in my practice at this time I think I held an idealistic view of inclusive practice, and I often felt frustrated and indignant that more was not being done to support children's' inclusion in schools. I continue to uphold the same values regarding inclusion; however, the current study has helped me to take time to understand some of the

experiences of people ‘working on the ground’ and what it is like for them to support pupils in a mainstream setting. Through research I had space to really think about this without the added pressure of feeling that I needed to do something about it, as I would have felt in my role as a TEP. I think this increased understanding of TAs’ experiences has been invaluable to help me to understand some of the practical complexities of supporting children with ASD within a complex system, and I believe this has already started to impact on my practice through increased empathy with TAs and school staff, encouraging collaboration between TAs and the class teacher, and focusing on systemic whole school practice.

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Appendix A: Evidence of Ethical Approval

The following email, dated 12/09/14 provides evidence of the study's ethical approval from Emma Williamson at the University of Bristol's ethics committee.

E Williamson <E.Williamson@bristol.ac.uk> 12/9/14

Hi Louisa,
Thank you for sending that information through. On the basis of the amendments you have made I am very happy to provide ethical approval for your study on behalf of the committee.
Please treat this email as confirmation that approval has been given. Should you require a formal letter then please contact Zaheda directly.
Finally, if your research changes significantly during the course of your study please keep the committee informed.

Good luck with your research,

Best wishes,

Emma

Dr Emma Williamson,
Senior Research Fellow,
Centre for Gender and Violence Research,
School for Policy Studies,
8 Priory Road,
Bristol, BS8 1TZ.

Tel: 0117 9546788

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

9th March 2015

Dear EarlyBird Plus attendee,

Re: Research project on the EarlyBird Plus program for children with Autism

I am writing to you about a research project I will be conducting on the EarlyBird Plus program for children with Autism as you have recently attended the program for a child you work with along with the child's parents. I would like to ask school staff about their experiences of supporting a specific child with Autism after they themselves or a school professional in the staff team has attended EarlyBird Plus training.

Overall, I hope that this research project will contribute to increasing our knowledge about the impact of the EarlyBird Plus program and how it can help to support children with Autism.

What will be involved?

You will be asked to take part in an interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. We would need a quiet space in which to talk and I would check with your school's senior leadership team that it would be ok to meet in school, at a time that is most convenient to you. These interviews will be recorded digitally and this data will be stored on a password protected computer for 10 years in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

Due to the nature of the project it will not be possible to meet with all attendees who express an interest. If this is the case then I will inform you by letter by March 31st 2015.

If you and your school consent to take part in the project I will contact you directly in order to arrange a suitable time directly via email and/or telephone. Interviews will likely take place in February and March 2015.

Do we have to participate?

No. It is very important that you are aware that you have a choice whether to participate in this project. I must have written consent from you before we can meet to do the interview.

If during the project you change your mind, you can contact me by end of September 2015 and your information will be omitted from the project.

Who will know what has been said?

Nothing will be kept in the study that could possibly identify an individual (e.g. a child's particular hobbies or interests, names of professional's etc.).

The anonymised report may be published in a research journal that is relevant to the EarlyBird Plus Program in order to share findings and inform future support for children with Autism.

If I am concerned about anyone's safety then I will follow local safeguarding procedures.

How will we be informed about the findings of the project?

At the end of the project I will create a report which will summarise the key findings of the research. I will send this directly to all parents and schools who have taken part in the project.

What should I do if I am unhappy about this project?

This study has been approved by the University of Bristol's School of Policy Studies Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study please contact my study supervisor:

Beth Tarleton (Senior Research Fellow)

Norah Fry Research Centre,

8 Priory Road,

Bristol, BS8 1TX

Tel: + 44 (0) 117 331 0976
Email: beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you consent to take part in the project, please sign and return the consent form to the Early Bird trainers in the envelope provided. Please keep the information sheet for future reference and do not hesitate to contact us if any further concerns or queries arise.

Thank you

Louisa Elston-Green

Trainee Educational Psychologist

University of Bristol

Tel: + 44 (0) 117 331 0976

Email: lg13365@bristol.ac.uk

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

The EarlyBird Plus program in schools: School staff consent form

If you consent to participate in this research project then *please place your initials* in each box to show that you agree with each statement.

- I have read and understood the information regarding the research project ☐
- I understand that the research is confidential and information will not be shared with the Integrated Support Service (Educational Psychology services). Information will only be shared with the appropriate professional if there is a concern about safety ☐
- I agree to meeting with the researcher for a 45 minute (approx.) interview about how my experiences of supporting a child with Autism and my thoughts about the EarlyBird Program
- I understand that these interviews will be recorded digitally and the researcher may take notes. This data will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act (see below) ☐
- I understand that all responses will be anonymised in written report and presentation.
- I understand that the information provided may be used by the researcher when writing their report of schools staff's experiences of applying principles of the EarlyBird program. ☐
- I understand that it is possible that the anonymised report may be published in a research journal which is relevant to the EarlyBird Program ☐
- I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my information up until the end of May 2015 ☐

Data protection:

- I understand that the data collected during this study will be stored on a password protected computer or in a locked filing cabinet for 10 years. All data will be anonymous ☐

- I understand that this data will be used only for the purpose of this study. ☐

Name……Telephone number:……email ……

Signed……Date……..

If you have any questions and/or concerns with the conduct of the project, or other details you do not want to discuss with the researcher, please email Beth Tarleton at: beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk

Appendix D: Senior Leadership Information Sheet

Monday 9th March 2015

Dear [Headteacher's name]

Re: Research project on the EarlyBird Plus program for children with Autism

I am writing to about a research project I am conducting on the EarlyBird Plus program for children with Autism. The EarlyBird Plus program aims to increase understanding of autism and strategies that aid communication. This program is attended by parents and a school professional.

Although research demonstates that staff and parents find the program useful, there is no research that looks at how people experience applying the principles of the program in practice. I would therefore like to explore this further by asking school staff about their experiences of supporting a specific child with Autism and how they find putting some of the ideas and principles from the EarlyBird Plus program into practice.

A member of staff at your school has recently attended the program for a child in their class and they have consented to take part in the study. I have also obtained written consent from the child's parents/carers to talk about how the EarlyBird Plus program has helped school professionals to support the child and how they find applying the principles in practice.

What will be involved?

As well as the TA/LSA, the child's class teacher and SENCO would also be invited to take part in the project. Each member of staff would be interviewed by the researcher and this would last approximately 45 minutes. We would need a quiet, private space in which to talk as the interviews are confidential. I could come in to meet with staff at a time that is most convenient. These interviews will be recorded digitally and will be stored on a password protected computer for 10 years in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

If you agree that staff are able to take part in the project then I will contact them directly via email and/or telephone to arrange a suitable time.

Do we have to participate?

No. It is very important that you are aware that you have a choice whether to participate in this project. I must have written consent from you before I can proceed to ask school staff to take part. If one member of staff chooses not to participate it may be possible for other members of staff to still take part.

If during the project you change your mind, you can let me know by the end of May 2015 and your information to be omitted from the project.

Who will know what has been said?

Everything that is talked about in interviews with staff will be completely confidential. If I am told something which makes me think that they or another person, are at serious risk, I will follow local safeguarding procedures.

Nothing will be kept in the reporting that could possibly identify an individual (e.g. a child's particular hobbies or interests, names of professional's etc.). The name and location of the school will remain anonymised, although you will be generally thanked in the acknowledgements along with the other schools who take part.

The anonymised report may be published in a research journal that is relevant to the EarlyBird Program in order to share findings and inform future support for children with Autism.

How will we be informed about the findings of the project?

At the end of the project I will create a report which will summarise the key findings of the research. I will send this directly to all parents and schools who have taken part in the project.

What should I do if I am unhappy about this project?

This project has been approved by the University of Bristol's School of Policy Studies Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study please contact my study supervisor:

Beth Tarleton (Senior Research Fellow)

Norah Fry Research Centre,

8 Priory Road,

Bristol, BS8 1TX

Tel: + 44 (0) 117 331 0976
Email: beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you consent to take part in the project, please sign and return the consent form to me at Lg13365@bristol.ac.uk Please keep the information sheet for future reference and do not hesitate to contact us if any further concerns or queries arise.

Thank you

Louisa Elston-Green
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Appendix E: Senior Leadership Consent Form

University of BRISTOL

norah fry research centre

The EarlyBird Plus program in schools: Head Teacher consent form

If you consent to participate in this research project then *please place your initials* in each box to show that you agree with each statement.

- I have read and understood the information regarding the research project ☐
- I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that I, and other staff involved in the project, are free to withdraw up until the end of May 2015 ☐
- I agree to you meeting with school staff for a 45 minute (approx.) interview about how they support a child they work with using principles from the EarlyBird Plus Program ☐
- I understand that these interviews will be recorded digitally and the researcher may take notes. these will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act (see below) ☐
- I understand that the research is confidential and information will not be shared with the Integrated Support Service (Educational Psychology services). information will only be shared with the appropriate professional if there is a concern about safety ☐
- I understand that the information provided may be used by the researcher when writing their report of schools staff's experiences of applying principles of the EarlyBird Plus program ☐
- I understand that all responses will be anonymised in written report and presentation ☐
- I understand that it is possible that the anonymised report may be published in a research journal which is relevant to the EarlyBird Plus Program ☐

Data protection:

- I understand that the data collected during this study will be stored on a password protected computer or in a locked filing cabinet for 10 years. All data will be anonymous ☐
- I understand that this data will be used only for the purpose of this study. ☐

Name……..**Signed**……

Date……

If you have any questions and/or concerns with the conduct of the project, or other details you do not want to discuss with the researcher, please email Beth Tarleton at: beth.tarleton@bristol.ac.uk

Appendix F: Reflections Following Pilot Interview

Autism and the TA role

	Text	**Ideal response/further questioning**	***Actual response/further questioning***	**Reflections**
1	*"Well I always look at autism spectrum disorder you know, well certain aspects of well their life and how they are able to deal with things their coping mechanisms, you know I think we all have those very little traits more than other and there's certain ways that you like things done--- in a specific way. and, um, obviously I was very fortunate to get into this job and start in the base and you have you know, obviously the children that we have are you know, wide range of abilities and disabilities that we have with our children but they're a pleasure to work with and with autism there's not just one specific needs, I mean the children that we have, you know, are a big category, so you know from the lower end to the top end so it's just helping them to be able to cope and to be able to try and live some sort of normal life…I hope I answered your question?"*	**There are no right or wrong answers, I'm really interested to hear your experience, so everything you're saying is very useful to me.** **Can you tell me a little bit more about why you think you were fortunate to have got into this job?** **Or a narrative approach 'can you tell me how you came to get the job?'**	*"Yeah, no, no that's brilliant. And what's your experience of, how do you feel, working with children with autism. How do you experience it?"*	I did go on to ask a general experience question but I don't probe more into what she had already told be- that she was very fortunate to get into the job
2				

	"The majority of the time satisfactory, the majority of it-sometimes very you get a lot of frustration obviously, you know it's something, with some children it's a slow process of actually working towards a goal and when you achieve that goal then there's other scenarios that come in place of that, you know, working with children, you know, you- there's on, there's one child at the moment you know can't deal with the driers or can't go into the toilets you know or one child at the moment is physically violent to one of the adults so.. or one child doesn't like eating in the canteen because of the noise so you know, I don't know I've forgotten the question but it's just dealing with….it's satisfactory dealing with their needs and being able to achieve that that they can cope with that and take that that on board as they move on in life."	**Can you tell me a little more about the frustrations**	*"(After some reflecting back of what she had said)….you talked a little bit about the frustrations, can you tell me a little bit more about that and what the frustrations are."*	I did ask about the frustrations and an open question to tell me more. I'm using some techniques to encourage the participant to open up about their experiences.
3	*"because you know you're trying to do their normal routine, their normal day and you know that sometimes you have to choose your arguments or choose your challenges and sometimes you have to step back and say, right well that's not working , they just need to do relaxation and you might not achieve any literacy or any numeracy or any of the provision because they're just not in the right frame to do that because it could be the smallest thing, maybe they've forgotten their PE bag or maybe they're wearing different socks or something or the other you know."*	**How does it feel for you when literacy or numeracy isn't achieved?**	*"mmmmm, so you always have to…any small thing you have to work out what it means?" [cross talk]*	I reflected back the words she was using rather than asking another question and probing deeper. I do this a lot throughout the interview which I think is a habit from therapeutic practice. If I had probed deeper I would likely have gained information on how achievement is linked to the experience of the TA.
4	*"well sometimes we could be doing the same activity every day and obviously having experience working with mainstream you could see the steps as they progress you can see them taking them in but with autism*	**How does that feel for you?**	*"How do you know if you're doing the right thing for them, what*	I think I'm trying to get at the TA's experience. However

	*sometimes it could take a year or 2 or sometimes you feel well actually am I am actually helping that child achieve sometime cuz sometimes you do you do feel frustrated, sometimes you think am I doing the right thing for them and it is very frustrating because **you** [emphasis] want them to make them steps because they could learn it one day or they could learn it for the whole week, come back from holiday and or even come back the next day and they, they won't do it."*	**Can you give me an example of a time when you felt ….**	*does that mean to you?"*	the TA answered in relation to the child's experience (see 5). But I think I jumped too quickly to the next steps rather than staying with the participant's experience of the child making progress.
5.	*"They're happy"*	**What does it mean to you if they are happy?**	*"so you know they're happy…"*	Just reflecting back again. I want to find out what it means to the participant for the child to be happy.
6.	*"That they're interested and they engage in it, if they're not engaging and they're not interested then you haven't achieved it."*	**And what is that like for you?**	*"So is that how you measure it?"*	I am bringing the conversation around to the external about measurement and impact. My focus is on the TA's experience, not impact. TA goes on to talk about external. The tone and the rhythm of the interview starts to get confused.

7.	*"yeah and all the all the children are different. You know they know, they know …..um how can I say this? looking at the variety of special needs they're all different but they all know their boundary points regardless of whether they are able to talk or able to communicate, they know their boundaries and you know it's quite nice seeing it if they- they will try to go over those boundaries, they will push but, I've forgotten the question.."*	**What is it nice to see with the children and their boundaries?** **What do you mean by boundaries?**	*"I think it was about how do you know that they're happy and things like that…"*	Does link back to the question asked before but TA finds it difficult to answer (see 8).
8.	*"yeah well you know…ah gosh I've lost it now"*	**That's ok. Just take your time to think about it. we're not in a rush.**	*"no, no, it really useful."*	I did try to reassure her that it was 'useful' but I think I needed to say to take time and take some pressure off.
9.	*"um…I'm trying to think now, you just know that they're happy within because it's u, you know if you're if they're happy and have achieved their work or they done something new or they've probably surprised you out of the ordinary, um, you know, you know if it's a good day or not a good day"*	**Can you tell me what a good/bad day would feel like to you?** **Ca you tell me what the main differences between a good and bad day would be for you?** **Can you give me an example of when this happened recently?**	*"so you can see it?"*	Reflecting back again. a useful strategy so that the other person feels heard but it does not help to go deeper to understand experience. Also closed question so get a closed answer (10). Would be very different to a rich description of a bad day with an example.

10.	*"yep, yep"*	**(See above)** **Or move onto next set of questions…..** **What has been your experience of the Early Bird program?**	*"Are there any ways that you measure it in class, their progress or how they're feeling? that help you or is it mainly…"*	Again back to external measurement and discussing external factors rather than experience.
11.	*"no we just go on by what we normally do because obviously with autism you need a structured day and if they have their structured day, sometimes things changes but as long as they are achieving they know we have the minimum where they, they need to do certain aspects of work in the morning and they get their goals and if they do that and they correspond with you in their own way because not all of them are able to talk then you know it's a satisfactory day but some days can just be totally blown out the window you feel you're hitting your head against the wall and sometimes you have to choose your arguments, you have to choose your battles and see what's working for them and what's working for you because you do build a relationship and because we're allocated per child you do have that type of relationship with them they know they, they they understand what you're like and what you're able to do and you understand what they like and do so you know you have that relationship. Does that make sense?"*	**Yes definitely. Can you tell you tell me more about the relationship you have with the child?**	*"yeah yea definitely, so you stay with that same child?"*	
12.	*"yeah all year"*	**What is that like for you?** **What happens next year?**	*"and will you stay with them next year?"*	Moving on too quickly and a bit leading
13.				

	"no because it'll be a change because…I think it's good to have change even though with autism they don't like change it's a good coping mechanism for them to have different adults so like I only work in the mornings but in the afternoon they'll have the same adult for the whole year"	**What is that change like for you?**	*"OK yeah so they have the same adult for the year and then it changes the next year"*	Reflecting back again. TA continued to talk about child's experience rather than her own.
14.	*"so the girl that I'm having at the moment she has me all morning and there's another adult that has her in the afternoons but come September then it'll be a change but then there will be transition books in place for that"*	**What role do you play in the transition?**	*"ok so you went to the early bird program for that specific child didn't you? How did you find the early bird program?"*	Moved on to next block of questions.

The Early Bird Plus Program

	Text	**Ideal response/further questioning**	***Actual response/further questioning***	**Reflections**
	"overall, um, very good, it was actually very good to meet some of the other work colleagues um to see their situation their ups and downs and issues that may arise you know with the parents. Obviously you have to be very diplomatic, you know um, but I think it's also good for the parents to actually see what we do at school and the work that actually goes in, and I don't think that's really appreciated because even though they have their, um, reviews or their statements it was nice to actually talk about, just in general, just see what the child's like at home how things work at home and then have that that sort of relationship and the trust with the parents as well so they get to understand what you're doing at work and you'll, I'll also understand what mum's going through at home. But then it	**You said that you have to be diplomatic, can you tell me more about that please?**	*"so what was that like for you when you were able to do that?"*	I did explore experience in general

	was nice to meet other work colleagues and other parents you know to have that support and you know, knowing that you're not on your own even though we've got a fantastic team you know, [SENCo]really takes good care of us, she's head of SENCo as well, and we're part of a team, we've got each other to fall back on but it's just nice to see a different environment in a different school and it's really interesting to see other different parents and or them talking about their children and having ideas from other colleagues"			
	"It was really good I mean at first I felt a bit um…I had to …sort of…be diplomatic, I did feel that during, I mean…..the lady 's that actually ran the course were fantastic but I just felt that at times they were certainly a bit biased and anti- the schools, because I understand maybe be anti about the system like with the local government etc., the politics and that aspect, but we actually work our socks off and I don't think they actually realise actually how much you know we are 100 % devoted to the children…and even though we don't have them 24-7 you know, we treat them like they're our own children when we go to work it's all about them."	**You say that you felt you had to be diplomatic, can you tell me more about that?** **What is that like for you when people don't realise?**	*"So it felt like maybe they were a bit biased towards the parents?"*	Reflected back what the TA was saying and this also emphasised external factors rather than how the TA experienced this.
	"yeah, and I think, I think, considering that obviously they had children that were special needs and obviously they probably had a …not such a good relationship or rapport with the school, I just felt maybe slightly it would be good for them to actually understand what actually we do and obviously there's legal requirements and certain things that we have to do, to protect ourselves and protect our children and obviously there's a system that we have to follow suit."	**What do you think about the system within which you work?** **What do you think parents would say you do?**	*"mmm so you're saying that the early bird program helped with that understanding a little bit but you still maybe feel that…"*	Reflecting back- does not go deeper.
	"it was more, it was more catered out for the parents which of course it's more for the parents and it was good for us to build a relationship with	**What would it have been like if it was**	*"yeah, no that's fine, your experience is*	Reassuring- as I was offering reassurance

	the parents which is, you know, obviously made it much more better for me and the child's mum. Um…and it also she knows who's looking after her child and I just felt …slightly that it was a bit biased towards the school system, sorry, yeah"	**more balanced and catered to you?**	*really important about it so…"*	TA interrupted, maybe if I had left a silence she would have carried on anyway
	"mmm yeah I just felt that because obviously there, whatever their relationship they had with the school I think you know we don't , you know, we don't get paid very well, you know, we work really hard hours and we do a lot for the children and you know ok, they're not our children, they're not we don't have them 24-7 but we put a lot of effort and work and planning in they don't see the back scene of what actually goes on, and we do try to accommodate, you know this school is very good, we do accommodate for them you know, as much as we possibly can"	**What do you think parents would say you do?** **How would this compare with what you think you do?**	*"for…? parents?"*	Checking question, a little bit leading
	"For the parents and for the children…any problems that arises you know [SENCo] is the one who normally deals with it on hand. We have a link book that we communicate with the parents, you know any issues, and anything that arises we go through the right channels and try to deal with it."	**Ca you give me an example?**	*"so when people don't, when you feel that people don't see that work that you're doing behind the scenes, what's that like for you and the other staff?"*	Good question! Trying to understand the TA's deeper experience
	"well I think it's just part of the norm isn't it, in any job that you do, but sometimes it's frustrating because with the autistic children that we work with they need consistency and they also need that consistency at home which sometimes is hard to have cuz you can do all the work at the school but it also has to be done at home and I don't think that was emphasised enough at the early bird"	**What would it be like for you if it was emphasised?** **How would that influence what you do on a daily basis?**	*"Oh OK, yeah"*	Encouraging- the Ta was still going on to talk, maybe this was not the right time to ask the more probing questions but I should

				have gone back to it at the end.
	"I mean they sort of said you need, you need these provisions, you need these PEX etc., we were looking at the pyramid the iceberg etc. which was brilliant but I don't think it was made very clear that you've really got to…make this work at home as well…it has to if it you know or if it works at home, the we want to take it on board at school as well to make sure that whatever's in place there works at school for them as well for the child, it's the child that is important, it's the child that's the priority and whatever works for the child."	**How would that influence your day to day practice?**	*"so it sounds like the link between home and school was useful to make but them it could have been built on a bit more"*	Checking out what I have heard- increases validity but I'm narrowing down on a small bit of meaning which I have chosen to focus on. IPA interviews are for opening up experience. Interpretation comes later.
	"and the thing is we do, we….I just felt, err, there was one parent that was going through a-…not such a brilliant …she didn't have a…obviously she had certain issues that she was having to go through the system, was experie- didn't have a really good experience soooo, you know but, we were putting things in place, it takes time unfortunately"	**Are you able to tell me a bit more about that?**	*"mmmm was this your parent or was this a different parent?"*	Clarifying who talking about – closed the conversation down a bit.
	"no, a different parent"	**What did that feel like for you?** **What was going through your mind when that was happening?**	*"oh ok… so is there anything from the program that you found useful to take in to school and use?"*	Closed down and change of subject- should have asked more open question – e.g. have you changed the way you support the child since attending? this would keep it within the TA's experience rather

				than naming strategies.
	"Oh gosh yeah there was different techniques, especially with the PECs and obviously with my communication and my language talking to the chid… and actually, and actually also because you do forget that sometimes if you talk too much, it has to be simple, it has to be easy instructions and I've been doing this for years and it's so easily you can forget and sometimes it's like they said, choose your battles. if you're not having a good day is it really worth hitting yourself against a brick wall you know sometimes you just have to think, right well, it's not working for that child, it's not working for me. ok take a breather let's do something else."	**What is it like when you are hitting yourself against a brick wall?** **Can you give me an example of when you felt like this?**	*"is that something that came from the program? the choosing your battles?" [Cross talk]*	A leading question. if I wanted to know where the TA had learned it from I should have asked that openly. not that important though. more important to focus on her experience. she has given me information that her experience has changed as a result of some strategies she learned on the program- I should have stayed with this.
	"yeah, yeah [cross talk]. Because sometimes you are so wrapped up or so in the system that you've got to do, this, this, this, this, this, we have to do this, this, this, it has to be certain du, du, du and you have to remember today actually it doesn't have to be that way if it's gonna be one of those days ok we'll do something else. It's just choosing, you know sometimes they just don't wanna work and then you think oh well actually yes you are going to work today. But sometimes they might not be in the right frame of mind emotionally or this or that they're not feeling well or something or the other anything can just kick off the day completely".	**Can you tell me more about being wrapped up in the system?**	*"so it sounds like the um, like how you talk to the child was really helpful…"*	I was thinking about outcomes for the child again rather than exploring TAs experience of the system.

Working together

I: **"Do you plan it or does the class teacher plan it? (the curriculum)"**

	Text	**Ideal response/further questioning**	***Actual response/further questioning***	**Reflections**
	"The class teacher plans it"	**Can you tell me more**	*"oh ok and do you get much in put in the planning or do you get much time to plan together "*	Closed questions. also initial question started off too focused. I should have asked broad question about TA's experience of working with others to support the child and whether they share the early bird program.

	"yeah we can contribute ideas but we can't we don't get time for planning together…so"	**Can you tell me more about contributing ideas**	*"how do you go about contributing ideas and stuff?"*	How you contribute ideas narrows down to one experience of actions. tell me more about contributing ideas leave it open and the TA might want to tell me more about related concepts or feelings.
	"[SENCo] will listen and when we have team meetings on Tuesdays and if there's anything we'd like to bring up specifically we do but that's about it.	**And how do you find it?**	*and is that useful?*	Leading and closed question!

Appendix G: Interview Question Topic Guide

Topic	Example of possible questions
Understanding Autism	• What is your experience of supporting the child? • There are many theories about autism, what does Autism mean to you? • What does it mean in everyday life working with a child with Autism?
The EBP	• What did you think about the EB program? • what has it been like after the EBP? • what is your experience of using the EBP in practice • What did you like the most? The least? • Has it changed your role?
Working together	• How do you find working with others at school? • What role does the class teacher have? • What has helped you put it into practice? What has hindered you putting it into practice? • Have you shared it with any other members of staff? How did you do it?

Appendix H: Examples of Coding Interview Data

Initial noting	Extract from transcript of interview for TA 4 (Sam)	*Potential themes*
	I: so can you tell me about your role and what year group you are working with and what you do on a day to day basis	*Role changeable*
First 6 months- role has changed Sense of time and change	P: so the first 6 months of me starting I was in the resource base with the key stage 2 so from 6/7 up till 10- is it year 6's yeah?	
	I: yeah	*Different role required for resource base and mainstream*
ASD children need a different set of skills? Dichotomous – working in resource base or mainstream	P: so I was a TA there so I helped them uh that was my first job with all the children so I was learning how to deal with them and now I've been moved out to do 1:1 with two of the children in that class- in mainstream so I still deal with the –uh- with the ASD kids but in mainstream now doing 1:1 with them.	*Resource base and mainstream separate*
	I: ok you were in the resource base, what's the resource base?	
	P: [O] class, yeah [O] class, which is on the other side of the school	
	I: and what is it?	*Ordinary vs autistic children*
ASD children set apart from 'ordinary' children in environment and use of language	P: it's uh, it's just uh split like three different rooms, and you've got a cookery room, a sensory room and a class room so the ordinary children go from place to place depending on their subject for that day it's like a unit base, well after school.	*Segregation*
	I: and what children go there?	
	P: it's all ASD so autistic children, there's one that non-verbal but that's about it really, then you've got the [R] classroom which is the disability one so yeah	
Segregation of autistic/SEN and mainstream children/physically disabled children	I: ok so just so I've got this right there's a separate unit for autistic children then there's a specific class for children with physical disabilities?	
	P: yep	
	I: but for the moment you're in mainstream but you're supporting two children is that right?	*TA Role – support transition to mainstream*

Moved with two children in transition to mainstream *OFSTED imposed change on school system- requires improvement* *Doesn't seem to be an inclusive ethos within the school* *Couldn't remember word 'inclusion'.* *Transition-can the children cope in mainstream? underlying sense that the child should adapt to cope rather than mainstream to adapt?* *Cut off support* *Support viewed as a 'perk' rather than a right or need. Led by need of the school rather than need of the child.* *TA plans work for two children. Is TA responsible for planning?* *'I have to' sense of disempower or coercion?* *Differentiation- part of TA role.* *Have to adapt to different levels of work.* *Negative word for non-compliance/behaviour difficulties.* *'we're in it together – identification with children.*	P: yeah from the [O] class I was in [O] class which I was in yeah. I: ok so um, it would be good to hear a little bit about transition as part of your role- so how did it come to you that you're in your role? P: so OFSTED came in and decided that was happening, needed improvement and that the children weren't getting their in a sense of the correct uh, what's the word I mean?.... what's the word when they put them into the classroom again? I: Inclusion? P: yeah, so they weren't getting that properly. so they're not getting that so what the school decided to do was take the two older children to see if they could cope in mainstream and I was put with them so the I moved over with them and took them for the whole day in there without any, with trying to cut off the [O] class to them so they didn't have any of the (inaudible) or any of the perks that the ASD children have like the sensory room- trying to take that away from these two children to see how they coped so it was me who did their maths work and do the planning for them to teach them what they know or if they could keep up with mainstream curriculum at the moment so, we have one now that I following the year 5 curriculum but the other one is on reception so I have to plan her reception work but keep the other child focused and up to data with what is happening in the year 5 class. Yeah so that's what I'm doing at the moment so I'm, with them two all day doing maths, English and Science and whatever we do in the afternoon, so they understand, so they're doing year 5 work but maybe a little bit of a tweaked idea. So they did it really well they are transitioning and kind of come to a point where none of them, well if they'd whined then I'd have been like what you on about we're year 5 we have nothing to do with that anymore, they coped really well with it I don't know if it's the way I did it with them I just told them that we're not doing it anymore and they coped with it which was really good really, really, really good. I: Brilliant so what was your- you said how you did it with them and stuff and I'm really interested in finding out a lot about your experience of the whole process and what it's like for you on a day to day basis, so I really want to try to	*External body imposed statutory change* *Segregation* *Lack of knowledge about inclusion* *TA role- support transition* *Change the child rather than the environment* *Inclusion viewed as a reward* *Lack of inclusive ethos* *TA role- planning* *TA role - focus* *Responsibility* *Disempowerment* *TA role- differentiation* *Identify with child* *Attitudes to non-compliance/ behaviour difficulties*

Feelings of anger – feeling unprepared and unskilled. *TA thought it was going good then was taken out- did TA think there might be an underlying reason?* *Cheeky- does TA mean presumptuous?* *Unprepared. EB course only training. Had to learn on the job.* *Changed professional approach and identity –'less babyish'. Different approach needed in mainstream to unit. Different expectations.* *Difference in academic expectations just because in mainstream and not the unit.* *TA believes his input has been successful.* *Why me? Did TA feel targeted?* *Not sure why it was TA. a sense that TA is different from others and that's why excluded. or could be to meet the needs of the child.* *TA considers different options.* *jokes that he is not liked.*	imagine what it's like for you on a day to day basis. So what was that like for you? P: how was it for me? Um when I found out it was going to be me that's going into mainstream I found it a bit of a windup because was expected to jump up to a complete new level which to myself at the time was just like how am I meant to do that because I was still getting used to autistic children when I hadn't dealt with them before and I thought it was all going good in the unit and then they brought me out of that to deal with these two children so it was pretty- in that sense it's like I thought it was- it was good –well now I look back and think about it I thought it was good but at the time I just thought it was a bit cheeky because I had no idea what I was doing and I'd had no previous experience- all I'd done was the Early Bird course which was for a different child completely to the two children I was given so I was a bit-uh-thrown in the deep end with it. But I guess I just learned how to deal with it so yeah it was just a case of I didn't act too babyish for how I used to act in the unit yeah I just become pretty strict with them and they dealt with it pretty well so I think I turned from being a nice fun person who in that well- in the centre they needed then to bring them out to try to sort them out to get them to level where they can do exams which one of them has gotten to now and the other child is slowly getting there. I: ok so that sounds like a real change- shift. P: it been a bit of a curve for myself going from that to this again and the two different requirements I need to try and get into which at the time I was a bit like why? why me? there's other people here who have experience but it's kind of worked out. I: and why did you think it was you at the time? P: I just think uhh, it was me – I'm not really sure why it was me to be honest- I think I was me because I was most probably the only guy in there maybe- so yeah maybe just because I was the only guy everyone else there were all female so I don't know if it was a case of let's just keep it all girls in there and have the guy taken out to see if it would work with them because I know that they thought maybe they would respond more to the male than they did with the female because the two children didn't really listen to the female teachers so I think they just gave them to me to	*Feelings of anger* *Unrealistic expectations of TA* *TA unprepared for role* *Organisation presumptuous* *EB course only training* *Learned from experience* *Unprepared* *Changed professional identity* *Difference in approach between mainstream and resource base* *TA viewed transition and input as successful* *TA targeted/victimised* *Perception of role changed over time* *Sense of difference from others – sense of exclusion* *Ta trying to make sense of reasons for move.* *Move based on child need*

	see how it worked out. I think. If not they don't like me (laughs) no but its ok.	*Joke or possible beliefs about exclusion*
Confusion- why me? unclear expectations of TA. lack of communication about decisions or role expectations from leadership *Lack of communication about role led to feelings of annoyance* *TA told they were doing parts of the job wrong- unsure of the right way to do it.* *leadership hierarchy and lines of communication unclear to TA.* *TA believed lack of organisation within school.* *Observed cause and effect.* *Used rewards – view rewards as bribes- related to coercion and power?* *TA gave clear expectations to children. Same expectations for behaviour as mainstream children.* *TA role to increase independence.* *help them to feel in control.* *Put self in child's position- give clue as to what is important to TA?*	I: so can you tell me a little bit more about what that was like for you when you found out that you would be moving across? P: um for me then it was a bit like, I was confused as I didn't know why it was me, I didn't know what was expected of me which nobody told me why I did move so it was trying to learn what I'm meant to be for them two children and what I'm meant to be placed in the class because if I'm a TA for everyone or a 1:1 TA who is doing two jobs for two of them and the classroom so there was like no talk to say what I would be doing so it was kind of a it was a bit of annoyance but at the same time there were a few obstacles you know a few people told me I was doing the wrong thing but then when I went to speak to that person I was told that I was meant to be talking to another person so it was pretty unorganised so but it wasn't unorganised for the two children I was with because they were just in there during the day, so yeah it was a bit of a muddle up in my opinion the whole thing. I: Ok so what was your first day like in mainstream? P: it was good. I didn't give them any work I just told them to listen I found it pretty easy just sitting there making sure they're listening <u>seeing how they react.</u> It was a case of instead of walking down to the other classroom bring them into a new classroom, give them their own table I kind of <u>bribed</u> them in a sense of giving them a locker each and giving them a tray that goes under their desk. I mean now we're in here we're mean to act like uh year 5's, 10 year old children and everybody gets this if they're responsible and they do well in class so they seem to enjoy that- they have their own draws- well the draws they put their own stuff in each one, their books are in there so their whole independence I've kind of put onto them in they think they're in control in their day to day learning so that how I deal with them. I: where did you get that from? P: it's just me, I just thought if I was a kid back then and I was moving to somewhere new how it would help. How would I try and think that I was in control. I just said this is what you get when you're good and this is what you do	*Feel victimised?* *Confusion about others expectations of the TA* *Lack of communication* *Lack of communication* *Feelings of annoyance* *Confused about leadership hierarchy and support* *Unorganised system* Valued observation of the children. Cause and effect- behaviourist approach. Coercion and power – children to conform. TA role - Clear expectations for children High expectations of SEN children TA role –increase independence Identify with child- put self in child's place

(Maybe control of the situation and achievement). *'Tricked'- deception to increase conformity?* *Inclusion viewed or portrayed as a reward.*	then you get given these and I said you are that just kind of went through it that was and kind of in a sense tricked them into thinking that this was because they had done really well in the centre when in fairness it turned out that they were just at a basic level when they could have done more if they were put into mainstream a lot earlier so that's how so it's kind of yeah- so that's how it's worked out.	Lack of transparency with child. Negative words for behavioural strategies Inclusion viewed as a reward.

Appendix I. Thematic Map for TA 1 (Kadin)

<table>
<tr><th>Potential themes</th><th colspan="2">Emerging themes</th></tr>
<tr><td>▪ Support wellbeing of the child and emotional regulation
▪ Help child cope in resource base
▪ Encourage independence
▪ Help child prepare for change and transition</td><td>TA role</td><td rowspan="3">Perception of role and what is important</td></tr>
<tr><td>▪ Class teacher/ SENCo has overall responsibility for the child's outcomes and planning</td><td>Teacher takes Responsibility for child</td></tr>
<tr><td>▪ Importance of getting space to gain perspective
▪ Building a relationship with the child
▪ Need to find out what works for the child
▪ Reflection on what works is important</td><td>Perceptions on what helps to support child</td></tr>
<tr><td>▪ Feels supported in the resource base and part of a team
▪ Feels that voice is heard
▪ Sense of TA belonging in school
▪ Trust in leadership and other professionals</td><td>Feeling supported and part of a team</td><td rowspan="3">Feel supported and appreciated by school but under-appreciated and criticised by others</td></tr>
<tr><td>▪ Feel that EB trainers don't appreciate that TA's receive low pay but work hard
▪ Message from EB program seemed to be that not enough done in school
▪ Does not feel EB trainers realise that school do everything they can (seems defensive/taken to be about personal efficacy)
School staff at resource base have already implemented the strategies from the EB+ program</td><td>Feeling under-appreciated by EB trainers</td></tr>
<tr><td>▪ Feels unappreciated when parents do not agree with TA or other school staff
Does not feel generally appreciated by parents</td><td>Feeling under-appreciated by parents</td></tr>
<tr><td>▪ Questions whether due to shortage of spaces at special school
▪ Specialists allocate without knowledge of, or meeting the child
▪ Parents are in denial
▪ Parents are not asking questions about placements
▪ Children not being admitted to special school are being let down by the system
▪ Children are not correctly placed as can -not talk about negatives in Annual Reviews
▪ Omission of inclusive values/ideology</td><td>Attributions and beliefs about increased level of need for children attending resource base</td><td>Omission of Inclusive values</td></tr>
</table>

▪ Questions goal of integration ▪ Base not skilled or equipped to support some children ▪ Attitude that if not meeting needs child should be moved to a different placement rather than change placement ▪ Belief that need to change type of child attending the base (rather than make changes to the setting) ▪ Child should fit in with setting ▪ ASD children should be given a 'chance' to cope in the resource base ▪ Adapt own role to meet the needs of the child	**Contradictions in attitudes towards adaptation of environment**	
▪ Go through the motions of Literacy and Maths ▪ When children are not making progress this is not questioned by professionals ▪ Believes child may not always be in the right 'frame of mind' to achieve ▪ Frustrated by lack of emphasis on academic progress	**Thinks should be more emphasis on academic progress**	**Frustrated by lack of emphasis on academic progress in school**
▪ Feels frustrated when child does not reach academic goal ▪ Measures own achievement by child's academic achievement Finds slow progress of child frustrating	**Own achievement entwined with child's achievement**	
▪ Feel frustrated when child's behaviour gets in the way of TAs goals ▪ Feel frustration when child doesn't do what want them to do ▪ Easy to get wrapped up in own focus/goals/way of doing things ▪ TA likes things to be done in a certain way	**TA inflexibility**	**EB increased flexibility in attending to child's needs**
▪ EB+ increased TA flexibility ▪ EB+ helped to 'choose battles' ▪ EB+ helped to relinquish control and reduce power struggles with child ▪ EB+ helped to respond more to the child's needs ▪ EB+ helped to see child as a person	**EB helped to let go of control and increase flexibility**	
▪ EB+ changed how talk to child	**EB changed TA practice**	
▪ School treated as a 'babysitting' service by parents ▪ Home-school consistency important ▪ Frustration at parents for not managing situations in the same way as school ▪ Would like to find ways to increase home-school communication	**Frustration about perceived lack of home-school consistency**	**EB+ improved strained working relationship with parents**

	and parental involvement	
▪ EB+ helped to build relationship with parents ▪ EB+ increase empathy towards parents	**EB + increased empathy and understanding of parents perspective**	
▪ EB+ biased towards parents ▪ Would like more EB+ training which is school focused ▪ Did not emphasise home school consistency enough	**EB+ specific limitations**	**Limitations of EB+**
▪ EB+ only benefits child whilst support by TA who attends the program ▪ Not enough time to share EB+ learning with others – although some informal communication with other TAs about learning from EB+ ▪ Quality of child support dependent on which TA will support them next and whether or not they have been on EB+	**Systemic limitations regarding impact of EB**	

Appendix J. Thematic map for TA 2 (Jem)

Potential themes	Emergent themes	
▪ ASD children not different ▪ Increased exposure increases understanding ▪ Need to accommodate for ASD behaviour ▪ Adults should change to meet needs ▪ Communicate positive attitudes to others in the community	Inclusive TA attitude	Congruency between TA inclusive attitude and school ethos
▪ Inclusive ethos in school ▪ TA contributes to inclusive ethos through sharing EB+ learning	Inclusive ethos	
▪ TA Sense of belonging in school	Sense of belonging	
▪ Increased understanding of needs of ASD children ▪ Changed attributions and perceptions of ASD	Increased understanding of ASD	Sense of change – personal and professional development
▪ Increase in confidence and skills ▪ Increased job satisfaction	Professional change	
▪ Change in emotional responses ▪ Personal development and change in value judgements	Personal change	
▪ Decreased controlling behaviour, increase in shared power ▪ Improved communication ▪ Increased empathy for children and their families	Relational change	
▪ Changes in TA noticed by TA, teacher and child ▪ **(**Use of '*before*' and '*now'* language)	Recognised by self and others	
▪ Collaborative working child, parent, teacher, TA ▪ Clearly defined roles and expectations ▪ Good communication between TA and teacher ▪ Collaborative planning between TA and teacher ▪ Teachers 'teaching' skills valued ▪ Trust in teacher ▪ Teacher is in charge ▪ Tasks delegated to TA by teacher ▪ Teacher overall responsibility for child	Collaborative working with clearly defined roles and responsibilities	Collaborative working and shared power between TA and teacher is mirrored in TA and child relationship
▪ TA feels heard and can make positive contribution ▪ TA shared learning from EB with class teacher ▪ TA increased responsibility after EB training	TA feels that makes a positive contribution	
▪ Give child responsibility to make decisions ▪ Convince rather than coerce ▪ 2 way communication with child important	Shared power between TA and child	
▪ Valued shared experience/experience of trainer on EB ▪ Reflective practice ▪ learning from child	Learning through reflective and investigative practice	Learning through reflective and investigative practice

▪ Being an *'investigator'*		
▪ Exploration of function of behaviour ▪ Behaviour as communication ▪ Understanding underlying reasons for behaviour helps decision making ▪ Understanding underlying reasons for behaviour leads to early intervention ▪ Understanding underlying reasons for behaviour means can generalised learning to other children	Important to understand underlying reasons for behaviour	Important to understand underlying reasons for behaviour
▪ Flexible approach ▪ Complex problem solving ▪ Preparation and planning for child ▪ Monitoring behaviour ▪ Group work/individual ▪ Emotional and behavioural regulation	TA role	TA role and preparation
▪ Felt unprepared for role ▪ Preparation important for TA ▪ Relief to go on EB training ▪ No previous training	Importance of training	

Appendix K. Thematic map for TA 3 (Ash)

Potential themes	Emerging themes	
▪ Feel that teacher understands the needs of autistic children ▪ meet child where they are at ▪ Adults led by child need	**Inclusive classroom environment**	**TA practice contained within teacher practice**
▪ Teacher is primarily responsible for child and parent communication ▪ Teacher leads on planning	**Teacher holds overall responsibility**	
▪ Teacher explains teaching and how to approach the task ▪ Learn academic content alongside the child	**Teacher's explanation of academic work important to pedagogic practice**	
▪ Feels supported by class teacher ▪ Reiterative feedback about what does and does not work in practice ▪ Plan with teacher every day (before and after school) ▪ Teacher and TA will book a time together to discuss issues if no time during that planning meeting ▪ TA puts in extra time for planning ▪ TA feels comfortable asking teacher questions	**2 way communication between TA and teacher**	
▪ Teacher allows flexibility in TA approach within planning ▪ TA able to use own initiative to respond to the needs of the child ▪ TA role (teach appropriate behaviour, communicate clear expectations, emotional regulation, support to join in socially, and mediated teaching, push child to achieve more).	**TA Role**	
▪ 4 way communication between teacher, TA, parents and child (Ta follows the lead of teacher). ▪ Working with parents can be most challenging aspect of the role ▪ Seeks teacher's support to reflect on practice during meetings with parents	**Follow the teacher's lead in collaboration with parents**	
▪ Sense of change in self-efficacy: Self-doubt about whether would be able to support a child in mainstream; Confidence and self-efficacy has now increased.	**Teacher supports TA confidence and self-efficacy**	

▪ TA's confidence increases after received explanation from teacher about academic content ▪ Sense of TA own academic achievement ▪ Doesn't feel worried about perceived judgements from other school staff as knows has teacher support ▪ Teacher support increases TA job satisfaction		
▪ Other staff across the school will help to support child	**Some school wide support**	**Wider school context not as inclusive as the classroom**
▪ Teachers understanding of ASD varies across the school ▪ Some teachers find it difficult to cope with adaptations and adjustments needed to support autistic children ▪ Sometimes feel judgements from other staff when using strategies to support autistic child ▪ TA feels lucky to be with the teacher TA they are with	**Inconsistent inclusive ethos**	
▪ Referred to own values and upbringing ▪ Sense of working collaboratively with child and mutual respect ▪ Early intervention is important ▪ Different approach to own parenting style ▪ Feeling that own values compatible with school ethos ▪ Emotional attunement with child and empathy	**Values**	**TA's own values influence practice**
▪ Important to understand causes of behaviour ▪ Relationship with and knowledge of the child important ▪ Learnt that all autistic children are different ▪ Learnt how to better gain the child's attention ▪ STAR and Iceberg helpful	**Learning from the EB+**	**Learning from EB+**
▪ Important for TA to understand why using the strategies ▪ Gave examples of the application of the STAR in practice	**Applying learning in practice**	
▪ Can apply strategies to work with other children using the frameworks	**Generalising learning from the EB+**	
▪ EB+ helps any child who works with the TA ▪ TA can support other children in the same class at the same time as the target child ▪ Shared strategies from the program with parents other than those who attended the EB+ for the target child	**Wider impact of learning from the EB+**	

▪ Shared frameworks with class teacher ▪ Handover of strategies to other members of staff		

Appendix L. Thematic map for TA 4 (Sam)

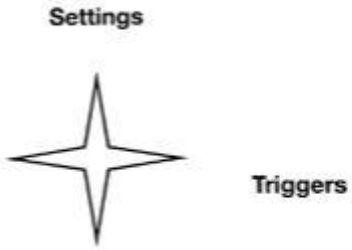
Potential themes	Emerging themes	
▪ Lack of TA involvement in decision making ▪ Oppression of TA voice ▪ Sense of helplessness ▪ Feelings of frustration ▪ TA disempowerment ▪ Lack of transparency from leaders ▪ Why me? ▪ Feelings of being targeted/victimised	Feelings of disempowerment	Disparity between perceptions of responsibility, competence and power
▪ Power struggles within the staff group ▪ Professionals viewed as the 'expert'	Perceptions power inequality	
▪ TA feels taken advantage of TA ▪ TA feels 'at the mercy' of leaders ▪ Work extra hours ▪ Others take the credit for TA's work	Exploitation	
▪ Blurred role boundaries between teacher and TA ▪ Views self as a teacher ▪ Holds responsibility for child ▪ TA as teacher without teacher pay and without credit ▪ Teacher takes no responsibility and all credit for academic progress ▪ Feelings of anger and confusion about level of responsibility	TA high level of responsibility	
▪ Felt unprepared for role ▪ EB course only training offered to TA	Felt unprepared for role	
▪ Lack of communication by leadership about reasons for decision making ▪ Lack of trust in other professionals ▪ Lack of guidance from seniors ▪ Confusion about the leadership hierarchy ▪ Confusion about role expectations ▪ School system unorganised/lack of planning ▪ Feeling that cannot meet expectations of leaders	Lack of leadership	Lack of two way communication between leadership and TA
▪ High criticism, low recognition of positives within school system	Lack of external validation	

▪ Need for external validation to support learning and development		
▪ Formed informal support group with other new TAs ▪ Other TAs supportive and offer guidance	Seek leadership from other TAs	
▪ Little communication from TA to seniors about practice ▪ Told by leadership need to share practice more	Acting independently	
▪ External body (OFSTED) concluded that inclusion within school requires improvement	OFSTED –inclusion requires improvement	TA role supports inclusion in whole school system with low inclusion ethos
▪ Other professionals have lower expectations for ASD children than mainstream children ▪ View that the resource base stifles academic and social progress ▪ ASD children infantilised ▪ Autistic behaviour exacerbated by attending the resource base	Views that staff other than TA's have low expectations for autistic children	
▪ Teachers are unaware of SEN needs ▪ Mainstream teachers negative perception of SEN ▪ Mainstream teachers do not want autistic child in class	Views that teachers have a negative attitudes towards SEN pupils	
▪ Doesn't seem to be inclusive ethos within school ▪ 'Cliques' formed by staff across school (in/out groups).	Lack of inclusive ethos in school	
▪ Need to adapt to child's needs ▪ Changed professional identity when moved from resource base to mainstream (fun → strict) due to different expectations of child ▪ TA role and duties in mainstream (support for transition, differentiation, facilitate understanding, increasing motivation, hold high expectations for child, clear boundaries, increase independence, break down tasks) ▪ Impact of TA role has increased social and academic inclusion ▪ TA believes that does job (to support autistic children) better than others	TA Role supports inclusion	
▪ Difficult to find meaning in theory ▪ View that theory is 'pointless' ▪ Belief that understanding causes of behaviour is not important	View that understanding theory and reasons for behaviour is not useful	In-congruency between beliefs (about theory and inclusion) and

▪ Implicit behavioural approach to practice (importance on observing cause and effect for individual child) ▪ Importance of relationship with child emphasised in understanding causes for behaviour ▪ Some theory about how to talk to autistic children helpful	Application of theory in practice	descriptions of practice
▪ Mainstream and unit should be more connected ▪ SEN integral to teaching and TA role ▪ Teachers need a higher level of skill in SEN in changing times	Views that inclusion is positive	
▪ Non-inclusive language used ▪ Change the child rather than the environment ▪ Inclusive strategies a reward bad behaviour ▪ Inclusive strategies described as a 'perk' ▪ Behavioural expectations should be the same for mainstream and unit children. ▪ Lack of knowledge about inclusion ▪ Sink or swim attitude	Non-inclusive attitudes and beliefs	
▪ Personal values (value action, hard work, ownership and responsibility, collaboration, compliance) ▪ Own upbringing, values and personality influences practice ▪ Draws on previous experiences as a child ▪ Intuitive practice	Personal values influence practice	Values and goals influence practice
▪ Value in learning from experience/shared experience/observation of others ▪ Low value placed on talking and reflection ▪ Low meta cognitive awareness (thinking about how think)	Values about learning	
▪ Aim: to train to be a teacher	Career and professional development goals	

Appendix M: The 'Star' Framework Taught on the EarlyBird Plus (Shields, 2004)

STAR stands for:
Settings
Triggers
Actions
Results



The STAR approach suggests that we see behaviour as serving a purpose for the child, enabling him/her to achieve a specific result, therefore it serves a function for the child. This function may often be communication, so the best aim will be to teach and encourage an appropriate behaviour to serve the same function, eg giving a picture symbol to ask for a toy, rather than kicking the dog!

Appendix N: The 'Iceberg' Framework Taught on the EarlyBird Plus (Shields, 2004)